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I

ON ROMANTIC MENTALITY

1

THERE are two fundamental impulses which work like ebb and flow in the development of mankind. One is centripetal, the other centrifugal. We may as well call them intensive and extensive, organising and disruptive, conservative and revolutionary, "classic" and "romantic." However hostile these two tendencies may seem on the surface, they are in essence complementary. Their interchange is responsible for the rhythm of life, for the rhythm of history. After an age of fermentation and chaos there follows a period of organising discipline; and when this "conservative" period threatens to become stale and stagnant, a new centrifugal or revolutionary impetus is needed in order to avert the danger of social petrefaction. Life, or the mysterious "life-force" (whatever that may be), thus takes care of itself.

This rhythmical breathing of history corresponds, on the whole, to the working of the two equally important halves of human personality: its rational half usually tends towards stable order, while its irrational half is inclined to disrupt everything that has become stable and static. Yet life would degenerate if fed by one

of these two impulses only. Directed by the "rational" half alone it would soon lose its dynamic *élan*, and the social body would become more like an organised machine than a living organism; a prevalence of irrational forces again would mean chaos and anarchy. It is chiefly the finite, the "practical" in man and life that is within the sphere of the rational. Hence the tendency of all rationalist ages to reduce the mystery of life to a few reasonable formulae and to look with certain distrust upon such things as emotion, passion, religious and mystical experiences. On the other hand, an uncontrolled surrender to these irrational elements would certainly destroy one's inner stability, one's will and perhaps also one's reason.

The process of human growth requires a continuous *dynamic* balance between our rational and irrational halves. Yet as their proportions are always changing (according to the demands of growth), this balance is bound to fluctuate. The need of living life may thus embrace to-day a tendency, a truth, which yesterday was perhaps considered a lie. Every epoch of human evolution has its own truths which remain "true" as long as they are vital. Once their vital force is spent, they must give way to new truths and trends which may be different, even opposite in kind. Thus an epoch predominantly religious is followed by a period of exaggerated rationalism; while a sober materialistic age is usually succeeded by "romantic" reactions which may be the very negation of sobriety. Was not the earth-bound paganism supplanted by the Christian impulse with its sense of

the Infinite and with its " transvaluation of all values " in the name of a higher Reality? And was not an analogous change in human consciousness (on a smaller scale, of course) responsible also for that wave of romanticism which, about a century ago, swept like an epidemic over European minds and Muses?

II

It is superfluous to insist on the hackneyed truth that the so-called romantic movement in literature was only a partial expression of a much wider change in the whole of European consciousness—a change which involved an entirely new attitude towards life and the world. This attitude had many causes, and the most decisive of them, perhaps, the one-sided rationalism and the brilliant artificiality of eighteenth century civilisation. For with all its enormous work of revision, that century was more " enlightened " than profound; and its enlightenment was powerless to raise it above the inherited prejudices of caste and social routine. The ideal of its ruling class was the sophisticated " man of society " whose mind and manners had first to be clipped, like the trees in the park of Versailles, in order to suit the taste of the time. The divorce between Civilisation and Nature (*i.e.*, naturalness) became so great that they well-nigh excluded each other. And so a readjustment was necessary.

England, with her large and emancipated middle classes, was the first country to assert the right of naturalness against formalism, emotion against stiff

reserve, imagination against dry reason, the real man against the ready-made society puppet. If seventeenth-century Europe was under the spell of French influences, the eighteenth century received from England those germs which were destined to destroy, later on, all sorts of "old regimes"—whether in politics, in thought, or in literature. The influence of *Ossian* is well-known. So is that of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which aroused interest in folk poetry and in the lore of the simple peasant masses at the time when Rousseau was calling humanity back to the simplicity of primitive man. Herder's *Voices of Nations*, the German folk-songs collected later by Arnim and Brentano (*Des Knaben Wunderhorn*), the Jugoslav sagas—revealed to the world by Vuk Karadjich, the Finnish *Kalewala*, the Russian *Byliny*, and scores of other collections all over Europe were in essence emulations of Percy. The spirit of folk poetry, with its directness and freshness, was smuggled into fine literature itself where it helped to revolutionise the European Parnassus. New strains could be heard in the ballads of Bürger, in the lyrics of the young Goethe (after his Strassburg period), in the poems of Burns, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth. Nor must we forget the influence of Shakespeare, who was discovered by the Continent in the second half of the eighteenth century. If Voltaire was still capable of calling Shakespeare a "drunken savage" (in 1776), the younger generations soon found in his creative freedom, as well as in his broad humanity, an ideal contrast to the stiffness of the pseudo-classic literature. Germany even adopted him

(thanks to W. Schlegel's masterly translations) as one of her own classics: a position which is endorsed also in our times—by German theatres and theatre-goers.

Parallel with this the influence of English imaginative and "middle-class" fiction was spreading. The blood-curdling romances of Mrs. Radcliffe, Horace Walpole, Maturin, and "Monk" Lewis may now lie forgotten under a century of dust; yet in their own day they rendered a great service in asserting imagination for its own sake. Then new vistas for the novel were opened by the works of Richardson and Sterne, which were soon acclaimed and imitated in other European countries. The second half of the eighteenth century offers the particularly interesting spectacle of a welter in which the spirit of a new age was trying to undermine all that remained of the old, "feudal" mentality. The most opposed values, trends and tendencies were asserting themselves in some way or other. Side by side with the rationalism of Locke, of Hume, of the Encyclopædists, and with the utilitarian doctrines of Smith and Bentham, we see the pietist religious movement of Wesley, the visionary irrationality of Blake, the teaching of Swedenborg, the occult hotchpotch of Cagliostro, the wild individualism of the "storm and stress" movement. Together with the pompous descendants of the pseudo-classic tragedies, odes and epics, we hear the refreshing tunes of Burns, the tender, child-like flute of the *Songs of Innocence*, and eventually the magic of the *Lyrical Ballads*. It was in that age that Rousseau's passionate invectives were clearing the ground for a general "romantic

revival," and there is more than mere chance in the fact that the early phases of that revival coincided with the thunder of the French Revolution, which can best be defined as the birth pangs of the new, i.e., the nineteenth-century Europe.

III

It was the first half of the nineteenth century that witnessed the growth, the height and the decay of that inner fermentation which is known as romanticism. One often defines the romantic movement as a rebellion against outworn conventions in literature and life; as a triumph of individual emotion and imagination, or even individual caprice, over dry intellectual routine; as a hatred of the drab actual life from which one wants to escape; as a thirst for the picturesque, the distant, the infinite, etc., etc. Romanticism certainly is all this; but at the same time it is more complicated and deeper than any of its single definitions. In a way it is true that there are as many kinds of romanticism as there are romantic individuals; yet all such individuals have certain features in common—features which can perhaps be summed up as the romantic mentality proper.

A preliminary clue to this mentality would be a brief analysis of Rousseau, who is often regarded as the spiritual father of European romanticism, although he died as far back as 1778. Rousseau certainly is its prototype in more than one respect. For together with a profound anti-rationalist strain we find in him that

impotence to adapt himself to reality which is the main cause of romantic other-worldliness, of brooding egotism, and of imaginary substitutes for active and actual life. Rousseau's biographies, including his own *Confessions*, show him as a shy dreamer who was always at the mercy of circumstances. He was morbidly sensitive by nature; but as his sensitiveness was not counter-balanced by an adequate will and discipline, he was drifting towards all the dangers of his sentimental passivity, coupled with egotistic mistrust and reserve. Unpractical, unfit for the hard struggle of life, he spent his youth shifting from one humiliating position to another—from the valet in Turin to the lover of " maman " de Warens, in Chambéry, at whose expense he lived for years and filled up at least a few gaps of his meagre education. Also later on, when at the height of his literary glory, he depended on the charities of his aristocratic admirers; and instead of coping with various intrigues (such as those of his mother-in-law, of Grimm, of Mme d'Epinay, etc.), he passively submitted to his fear and rancour until they developed into a kind of persecution mania which brought him to the verge of madness. This was aggravated by the fact that Rousseau was a socially uprooted individual. Having deserted his own class he was never accepted on an equal footing by that " Society " the entrance into which he managed to secure by the force of his eloquence and genius. He remained for them a talented plebeian—a position which such a touchy and morbid egotist must have resented more than once. The same touchy egotism

made him disguise, sooner or later, his own weakness with regard to reality in such a way as to make it less objectionable. Aware of his compromises with various moral and other principles, he blamed for his own faults not himself, but the "corrupt" civilisation of the age in which he lived. It was here that the rancour of a plebeian and that of a brooding moralist met in order to make together a ferocious onslaught on civilisation.

Discours sur les sciences et les arts, Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité, La Nouvelle Héloïse, Emile, Contrat Social—are only stages of that inner process which compelled Rousseau to prove that the real cause of his own failings was not within himself, but in the whole system of contemporary life. His rancour came out in the shape of moral indignation and of a reformatory zeal which made him preach to the rest of the world those ways of salvation which he himself desired most. To the artificiality of Civilisation he opposed Nature, to the current rationalism an exaggerated cult of sentiment, to corrupt Society the innocent, idealized savage. And in order to make a public moral apology for his own life he wrote his *Confessions*—one of the most personal (and unconsciously hypocritical) books of modern times.

It was his hidden moral spite against himself that made Rousseau despise the whole of civilised humanity. This spite increased his longing for a better mankind in the same measure in which he was striving towards his own regeneration. In his utter uprootedness he fell back upon himself. Brooding as he was, he lost all spontane-

ous joy in people and things : he could enjoy them only in reminiscences and through reminiscences, which he usually remoulded in such a way as to make them suit his own subjective needs. His uprootedness and introspective egotism only reached their final limit when he wrote (in his *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*) : " All that is outside myself is henceforth foreign to me. I have no neighbours in this world, none who are like me, no brothers. I feel as if I had fallen on to this earth from a foreign planet where I lived before. Whatever I notice in the external world brings to my heart only pain and affliction ; whenever I cast my eye upon things which surround me and are connected with me I always find in them some aspect or other which arouses my spite and indignation, or else gives me pain. Alone for the rest of my life—since I find the only solace, hope and peace within myself, I must not, and no longer want to, occupy myself with anything else except my own ego."

His exaggerated sensitiveness grew with every shock and disappointment he had to endure. He became more and more helpless and morbid. At last he saw a foe, an *intrigant* in everyone he met, even in his sincerest friends. In his isolation he went " back to Nature " in a literal sense, too—partly because all contact with humans and with the realities of life had become painful to him, and partly in order to find a haven of rest, to dissolve in Nature as a Buddhist dissolves in Nirvana. His dreams carried him at the same time as far away from the corrupt present as possible—back to the " golden age " of a patriarchal humanity into whose

idyll he projected all his pious wishes and yearnings. The primitive harmony of savages he preferred to that inner division, and even disintegration, from which he was doomed to suffer to the end of his life. He may have misdirected his longing; yet with all his faults he was sincerely anxious to discover those elements which could restore to man the lost fullness and harmony of existence.

Rousseau's significance for the modern consciousness lies in the fact that he was the first to give utterance to certain aspects of that uprootedness which began to invade European mind at a period when the new industrial era was paving her way through the remnants of the decaying feudal world. What is known as romanticism was, above all, an inner reaction to that transition period which dislocated all former ways and values, mixed up all classes, destroyed all faith, all proper orientation, and was gradually transferring the centre of gravity to purely external, that is, material factors.

IV

Uprootedness is a natural phenomenon in a period of economic confusion and of social disintegration. Such a period always produces a number of individuals who do not belong *organically* to any class or group. They are unable to accept the surrounding conditions, either because they are too weak for the hard struggle of life; or because they cannot adapt themselves to new circumstances; or because their own tastes and demands are much too high ever to be satisfied. In the

first two cases one usually yields to the line of least resistance: one finds certain imaginary or emotional substitutes for the fullness of actual life, and one surrenders to them passively in the way one surrenders to drugs or to enticing daydreams. In the third case, however, one may not necessarily be a weakling. One may be very strong even, only one's strength becomes here one's greatest danger. For, devoid of an outlet in active life, strength either wastes itself in a futile quest for an adjustment to reality, or it turns against life and becomes purely negative. What under other conditions would become a great constructive power, here degenerates into defiance, or better still, into revenge on the part of the individual for his own uprootedness. So much so that the only intense way of life he finds eventually in the intensity of his own despair, of his destructive fury, or of those subjective ideals and visions with which he opposes the unacceptable drab reality. Devoid of an organic contact with life as a whole, he is compelled to fall back upon himself, and to oppose the value of his own ego to the rest of the world. He may inflate that ego to "titanic" and "supra-human" dimensions, until he himself becomes convinced that he is so immeasurably above actual humanity that there could not possibly be any agreement between the two. His uprootedness thus becomes in his eyes a further proof of his imaginary greatness. Yet his very egotism is that of a man who is secretly afraid that his own ego may go to pieces.

All exclusive egotism has to face its own dangers. It leads to a growing introspection, and the deeper

this process the more contradictions it reveals in man's consciousness. It is not only the psychological fact of " ambivalence " on the part of our impulses that is painful ; what is more painful still is the awareness of that inner self-division which seems to be unavoidable in the advanced modern individual. The causes of this phenomenon are deep and distant : they go at least as far back as the Renaissance. It was owing to the spirit of Renaissance that the European individual dared to assert his own inner freedom against the tutelage of the Church, of tradition, and to proclaim himself the measure of all things. But no sooner had the first exaltation of this freedom gone, than he found an emptiness around himself. His independent questioning mind became sceptical and gradually destroyed all those ties which had linked him before to the rest of humanity and to the Universe. He analysed away everything, until he saw at last that his freedom had brought him only isolation, despair, and a chaos of contradictions. Hamlet, in all his aspects, was a logical product of the Renaissance mentality, being at the same time the proto-type of the modern self-divided man. The eighteenth century, with its somewhat superficial optimism and its equally superficial scepticism, only postponed this self-division, which reached its highest pitch in our modern consciousness. The modern man has discovered the truth that the impulse of individual self-assertion for its own sake can never serve as a sufficient focus for holding the personality together, and at the same time he is unable to find a focus beyond himself. He cannot transcend his

isolation ; he can only forget it for a while—in the hectic bustle of life, in art, in futile religious and mystical experiments, in " titanic " self-glorification, in imaginary fancies and visions which transfer him (either in space or in time) *bien loin* from the hated reality, and sometimes simply in drugs.

This isolation grows according to the sensitiveness of the individual, and it can go so far as to make all contact with the outward world unbearable for him. To repeat with Rousseau, " I feel as if I had fallen on to this earth from a foreign planet where I lived before. Whatever I notice in the external world, brings to my heart pain and affliction . . ." So the only reaction is to transfer the centre of gravity from the external to the inner world with all its irrational allurements and possibilities. Yet, having surrendered to the " subconscious " irrational elements, the individual may be overwhelmed with even greater contradictions than ever before—contradictions which threaten to destroy the last remnants of his will, his inner balance and orientation. He may for a while remove the danger by compelling himself to embrace some guiding principle, idea or ideal which would be strong enough to *impose* upon him an inner focus. Nietzsche's ideal of the Superman is an example. Other instances can be found in some of those German romanticists who submitted to Roman Catholicism, not so much from real belief as from the need of an unconditional spiritual obedience imposed upon them by a church which pretends to be infallible.

The very eagerness with which one welcomes at times such outlets shows that self-centred egotism is only

one pole of " romantic " mentality, while its other pole is a genuine search for a higher, synthetic harmony of man—as distinct from the unconscious primitive harmony of a child or a savage. That extreme subjectivism which makes one see in the world only one's own moods, pains and emotions, is counterbalanced by an ardent though unavailing desire to get out and beyond oneself, or even to reach that universality through which man expands into mankind.

V

An uprooted and self-divided individual becomes " romantic," because otherwise he would be unable to endure life. As he can neither adapt himself to reality nor adapt reality to his own needs, his instinct of *inner* self-preservation prompts to him such psychic means as will fill up the gap between him and life. In this procedure he can take, on the whole, two directions, which depend largely on whether his temperament is active or passive. A passive romanticist will seek, above all, for a comfortable refuge from his pain of isolation. He will look for it in a subjective world with its imaginary passions and events; in the fanciful panorama of a distant age, or of a distant exotic country whose " gorgeous " pageants are the exact reverse of the drabness he has to endure; or in a *deliberate* craving for a union with Nature, with the Infinite, with God. The fantastic, the visionary, the spiritual, the overwhelmingly emotional—such are the main tracks of this quest, and they are full of unexpected

discoveries in the realms of man's inner life. The mysteries of our unconscious self, the nuances of our emotions, the depth of our *Weltschmerz*, our new approach to spiritual realities, our new attitude towards nature—all this is due in some way or other to romanticism which has enriched and enlarged the contents of European consciousness more than any literary movement before or after it. And since such new content required new ways of expression, it produced also an entire revolution in poetic language, imbuing it with colour and music, with new tones, rhythms and images.

While a passive and contemplative romanticist shelters himself from life, a suppressed active temperament may become a severe critic of reality, or even a rebel. Thirsting for the fullness of life through activity, he is incapable of finding a contact with society. Consequently he sees in society his enemy, his opposite. This is why he champions the nihilist chaos on the one hand, and his own uprooted, morbidly self-assertive ego on the other. Instead of trying to escape from life, he goes back to it ; only he does so not in order to come to terms with it, but in order to assert himself against it, to expose it by showing all its drabness, injustice and ugliness ; to prove, in short, that it is unworthy to be accepted. The intense sadness of a Leopardi may thus be replaced by the whipping sarcasms of a Byron, a Lermontov, or a Heine. It is here that the romantic impulse often dons a realistic, even extremely realistic garb. Much of Gogol's " realism," for example, is in its essence the inverted romanticism of a man who takes

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revenge upon life by means of his indictments and his proverbial "laughter through tears." The romantic rejection of reality can pass into a rejection of the Universe as a whole. In other words, the social uprootedness of the individual may go to the extent of cosmic uprootedness, breeding in him those Satanic impulses which culminate in a spiritual rebellion against both the Universe and its Creator.

VI.

Does this mean that romanticism is *only* disguised weakness, an illusion of strength rather than strength itself, a "will to power" only, instead of real power? Not necessarily. One can point to epochs which combined various "romantic" features with real strength and fullness: the early Renaissance, for instance, and the Elizabethan period. Yet it would perhaps be better to call those periods adventurous rather than romantic. For there is a difference in these two terms. A strong, full-blooded age may not be romantic at all *in its attitude towards life;* but as long as it has an abundance of strength it cannot help being adventurous, that is, daring and squandering. An adventurous attitude wants to enrich and to intensify life as it is, while a romantic attitude is looking chiefly for intense substitutes for actual life. The two do not, however, entirely exclude each other. A full-blooded individual whose adventurous inclinations find no proper outlet in the sober present-day world will naturally seek for an imaginary outlet in an age more adventurous than

ours ; only his " romanticism " will be not so much a refuge from actual life as a *complement to it.* There was a fair amount of such exuberance in Dumas the elder, and probably (in a more disciplined way) also in Sir Walter Scott. Other writers with similar inclinations may try again to intensify their own vision of surrounding actualities into those grand and in essence romantic dimensions which we find in Balzac's novels, for instance. Or they may embrace some revolutionary creed which they zealously preach and sometimes even practise. Humanitarian messianism as expressed by Victor Hugo, by George Sand, and also by the early Utopian socialists, certainly approaches the category of that romanticism which is revolutionary not so much from rancour against life, as from a somewhat naïve and at times too declamatory faith in life.

Utopian creeds of various kinds were fostered also by that semi-mystical conception of nationalism which had its origin in the romantic movement. Both the conservative slavophilism of Russia and the revolutionary messianism of the Polish poets, Mickiewicz, Slowacki and Krasinski, were thoroughly romantic. It was through trends such as these that romantic elements were smuggled even into active politics. Was not the Polish revolt of 1830, and partly also that of 1863, full of such elements ? Or the Greek rebellion which was joined by Byron himself ? Italian romanticism, too—that of Leopardi, of Foscolo, of Mazzini—was intensely patriotic. So was that of the Jugoslavs (the " Illyrian " movement), of the Czechs, of the Hungarians.

Certain romantic qualities, when grafted upon life with its practical purposes, may and do increase its dynamic verve—by directing it towards the ideal.

VII

All this only proves the intricate and Protean character of the romantic mentality so-called. It also shows that single romantic features can be related to impulses which have little in common with the romantic attitude proper. No one will put Byron and Wordsworth, for example, into the same category ; yet both of them are different manifestations of one and the same romantic spirit which they expressed each according to his own temperament. The fact that most romantic poets and writers were uprooted men who turned their back on life for the sake of their own subjective dreams, does not involve a wholesale condemnation of romanticism, as Nietzsche (who was himself a typical romanticist) thought. The value of the romantic impulses depends on the plane on which they are used, and on the direction which they are given. All the same, the truth remains that higher health requires rootedness, and rootedness leads to realism, or better—to that synthesis of romanticism and realism which we find in Shakespeare. But Shakespeare is unique and, besides, he was a child of a stronger and more vital epoch than our own. Most European romanticists were spiritual descendants of Rousseau and not of Shakespeare ; that is, they created, not because they were in harmony, but because they were in a continuous discord

with life, from which they tried to shelter themselves behind various poetic substitutes.

A meticulous examination of such substitutes would lead too far. Suffice it to indicate these romantic types according to their dominant features:

1. The sentimental-contemplative or "dreamy" type.
2. The fantastic-imaginative type.
3. The exotic type.
4. The mystical-philosophic type.
5. The emotional-Dionysian type.
6. The analytical solipsist.
7. The militant rebel; the "Promethean" and Satanic type.
8. The "realistic" romanticist.
9. The romantic aesthete.
10. The social-humanitarian and Utopian type.

In every romantic writer one can discover at least a few of these features combined. It is the proportion between them that determines the trend of his life and work. But quite apart from art and literature, we are all romantics in a way, whatever else we may be besides. We are romantic in our dissatisfaction with the world as it is, in our innate craving for higher forms of life, for beauty and perfection. The main thing is to be able to discipline this romanticism and to make it active, not by opposing it to life, but by completing and intensifying it through a ceaseless creative effort.

II

BALZAC

I

It was the young Victor Hugo who once defined romanticism simply as "nineteenth century literature." His words were true with regard to the period in which they were uttered (1824), and fairly accurate with regard to the future. The romantic mentality impressed itself so strongly upon the art and letters of the last century that even various reactions against romanticism were often romantic in disguise. One could point to quite a number of romantic elements even in Zola. The "symbolist" school again, so characteristic of the *fin du siècle*, was in essence but romanticism modified by the technical, spiritual and intellectual conquests which European literature had made in the meantime. Those conquests only confirmed the truth, that all art tends to look for its stimuli in some "romantic" impulse, which should however, be directed towards life, and not away from it. For, all that disregards life is in danger of being thrown out of it as something superfluous, or even harmful. And the chief mistake of many romanticists proper was their excessive subjectivity, their lack of contact with the actual world. They either lost themselves in their own personal moods, or else

exercised their prolific imagination at the expense of the rest.

This hypertrophy of imagination, which preferred fanciful superstructures upon reality to reality itself, can perhaps explain the surprising productiveness of many a romantic writer. Dumas the elder is responsible for about four hundred volumes; no less prolific were the Pole, Ignatius Kraszewski, and the Hungarian, Maurus Jòkai—to name only a few of them. Quantity thus began to grow at the expense of quality. Dumas is even supposed to have started a literary factory with a number of expert scribblers to whose "romantic" lucubrations he only put the final touch of a master, and gave them out under his own name. Such commercial methods naturally cheapened the novel, debasing it to the level of sensational shockers, pot-boilers, and mental drugs. A reaction was imperative for several other reasons, too, and it began to set in, particularly after the July revolution of 1830. The social changes on the one hand, and the rapid growth of the scientific spirit on the other, were bound to give a new note to literature, to bring it nearer to the realities of life. This tendency was stimulated—in its own way—also by A. Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy*, which began to appear in 1830. Heine, the most brilliant transition figure in the European poetry of that period, often compelled his Muse to don the garb of a fighter for a better future of Europe; while another giant of European letters, Honoré de Balzac, tried to unravel the hidden springs underlying the entire life of modern society. For this reason Balzac became as important for the subsequent

" realistic " novel as Scott had been before him for the romantic one.

II

It is almost impossible to avoid commonplaces when dealing with a writer such as Balzac. Yet no matter whether we agree with the current views about him or not, we cannot deny the fact that his series of novels, *La Comédie Humaine*, is so far the most ambitious enterprise—at least in its conception—that European literature can show. This enormous work, which includes over a hundred novels, stories and studies depicting all the aspects of French life between 1789 and 1848, was referred to by Balzac himself as the " Thousand and One Nights of the West." In its aim it is, however, much more than that: it is an attempt at reconstructing the face and the soul of an entire nation during the most complicated period of its history. However scientific the character of such an aim may have been, Balzac tackled it as a novelist, and the result certainly was astounding. We may often stumble over the æsthetic defects of Balzac's books; we may find him at times clumsy, uncouth, and loquacious; but we can hardly help being overwhelmed by the cyclopic scale of his genius. His very clumsiness is that of a cyclops who is too much of a natural force, too broad and too elemental ever to be fine. He is " only big."

Characteristics which strike one in Balzac are first of all an incredible vitality, an exuberant temperament, an endless capacity for work, a huge appetite for life, and a kind of Rabelaisian expansiveness. A man of

such a stamp seems to be born for action, and that in big dimensions. Balzac would certainly have been an ideal man of action, had he not possessed a quality which was as much responsible for his failures in practical matters as it was for his success in art. This quality was his imagination. For, however acute and realistic his eye may have been, his imagination was so strong as to intensify everything he saw or thought to the verge of hallucination. Intoxicated and deluded by it, Balzac could never become a sober, a " practical " man of affairs. All his attempts in this direction were doomed to fail—quite apart from the obvious reason that by his origin he was both a financial and a social nobody. The only road which was open to his indomitable will was that of literature ; and when he embarked upon it, he did so with all his vitality, his endurance, and his ambition. He wanted to become nothing less than a Napoleon of letters. " What thou hast not achieved to the end with thy sword, I will achieve with my pen." This was the motto he wrote under a bust of Napoleon which he kept in his room. Even Balzac's notorious propensity for social climbing was due not so much to the ambitions of a *bourgeois-gentilhomme* (although this strain, too, was conspicuous in him) as to his " power-complex," which naturally sought for outlets also apart from literature. Knowing that money was the only spring and symbol of power in modern society, he wanted to enrich himself quickly and on a big scale. Prompted by the demon of finance, he started, already in his twenties, several publishing and other enterprises,

none of which succeeded. The result of his failures was enormous debts which he could hope to pay off only by means of his literary earnings. The inner heat of his imagination and of his visionary power was thus reinforced by the external pressure of financial difficulties, which made him work without respite and at such a feverish speed that he was never able to smooth and polish his rapidly multiplying novels. And since he himself had to grapple all the time with financial obligations of a most difficult kind, he was compelled to study not only the problem of money, but also that society which is built on money and on the fiercest economic struggles.

This is why Balzac penetrated deeper than any of his contemporaries into the world which arose out of the havoc wrought by the French revolution: the world of the victorious *bourgeois* who turned into cash everything, including his soul and brains. In this world of "solidified egoism" entirely new types, new relationships, new shams and social laws arose; and Balzac's work was the first great epic which tried to show and to explain this strange metamorphosis. He scrutinised the French nation in all its branches, functions, and divisions, in order to catch the throbbing pulse of the whole of his age and to record it, with all its causes and effects, in his "Human Comedy"; to record it not as a mere describer, but as an interpreter, as an artistic creator and re-creator. His aim was to give an Encyclopædia of life and manners in the shape of living characters and their conflicts. Aware of the new social changes which were both radical and rapid, he was anxious to discover the inner laws of this process. At

the same time he approached modern humanity almost in the way a scientist would approach the animal kingdom. In the introduction to his "Human Comedy" he even laid stress on the fact that "there always have existed and will exist different social species as there exist different zoological species." The important point, however, is that he adopted such methods in his writings during the sway of romanticism with its purely imaginary inventions—those of Eugène Sue, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, and others. An innovation of this kind necessarily cleared the ground for a realistic vision of world and life, and also for a more realistic method in literature.

III

Balzac's realism is, however, only one aspect of his art. Its other aspect is his "romantic" exuberance due to his own vitality on the one hand, and to his imagination on the other. His hypertrophied imagination exaggerates and magnifies everything he sees. His temperament increases, at the same time, the heat and the pulse of that reconstructed world, which we find in his novels, to such an extent as to make it look romantic in its very realism.

As a child of a romantic age (he was born in 1799) Balzac never got rid of some of its typical qualities, in spite of his new methods. The curious wavering between Balzac the romanticist and Balzac the realist can be traced during the whole of his literary career. His youthful works—about a dozen novels written by him under various pseudonyms between 1821 and 1824—

were "sensational" romantic shockers in the style of Mrs. Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis and Maturin. His real creation began only in 1829, when he published, after a three years' silence, *Les Chouans* and *Physiologie du mariage*. These two works indicate already a certain division in Balzac between the romantic and the realist. While the first book is influenced by Scott, the second is a meticulous and sometimes rather unpleasant analytical study. His next novel, *La peau de chagrin* (*The Wild Ass's Skin*, 1830–31) is remarkable for its skilful mixture of a romantic theme with realistic descriptions. A couple of years later (1833) we see again something like a divorce between the two: his *L'histoire des treize* (*The History of the Thirteen*) is mainly romantic, while a novel such as *Le médecin de campagne* (*The Country Doctor*) is not only realistic but also overburdened with passages on social topics of the day. His powerful *Eugénie Grandet*, which appeared in the same year, is a piece of intensified realism. The same can be said of his other two masterpieces, *Le Père Goriot* (*Old Goriot*) and *La recherche de l'absolu* (*The Quest of the Absolute*), published in the following year: the first being the tragedy of a bourgeois King Lear, and the second an analysis of a scientific dreamer and monomaniac. *La femme de trente ans* (*A Woman of Thirty*, 1834) is again an uneven mixture of fine realistic observation and of crude romantic melodrama. He relapses into romanticism in his *Melmoth réconcilié* (*The Reconciled Melmoth*) and in *Seraphita*. The first is linked up with the theme of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), a romantic "thriller" by Charles Robert Maturin; and

the second is strongly flavoured by Swedenborg's mysticism, the acquaintance with which Balzac owed to his mother, and perhaps even more to his mistress, the Countess Guidoboni-Visconti. Also in his psychological novel, *Le Lys dans la Vallée* (*The Lily of the Valley*, 1836), he pays tribute to romanticism both by his conception of love and by his rhetorical style.

Roughly from 1836 onwards Balzac the realist began to predominate. This was particularly noticeable after 1842, when he conceived the plan of arranging all his forthcoming and most of his past works into one single series under the general title, "The Human Comedy." Thus his *Histoire de la grandeur et décadence de César Birotteau* (1837) is a realistic drama of bankruptcy. Equally realistic is his *Les illusions perdues* (*Lost Illusions*, 1837–43), above all the sections dealing with the life and manners of the world of journalism. *La cousine Bette* (1846) and *Le cousin Pons* (1847) offer another series of wonderfully worked out pictures of human relationship based on money only and on appearances. These and scores of other novels record Balzac's recreated vision of the actual world and life, a vision which is so intense that it often seems incredible because of its very intensity.

IV

The vision of Balzac is a resultant of his observation and imagination. These two are not always blended in his works; sometimes they even seem to interfere with each other; but whenever they meet and blend the magic of Balzac's genius and intuition becomes

irresistible. His eye gathers thousands of impressions, and while his intellect is trying to analyse and order them, his imagination remoulds them into a world which is more intense, more hauntingly real than the world we know already. Balzac either mixes up the imaginary with the real, or he swells the observed facts to their farthest, their fantastic limits, in which he resembles his great admirer, Dostoevsky. Yet Balzac is less subjective than Dostoevsky. He also avoids those inwardly complicated characters who were Dostoevsky's favourite heroes. In Balzac it is humanity that is complex, while his characters are simple, or at least simplified. It is not the interaction of several passions in one and the same individual, nor is it the variety of all his features that matters to him. What he is after is the presentation of a character through the various aspects of his dominant attribute only, which he usually magnifies to the exclusion of everything else, making it an obsession, an elemental force and a fatality. It is an old commonplace that his Grandet, for instance, is not a man who happens to be a miser, but miserliness itself which absorbs the man without leaving room for any other inclination. The old Goriot again embodies the mania of fatherly love, and Claes (*The Quest of the Absolute*) the mania of science. Baron Hulot (in *La cousine Bette*) is a libertine carried to the farthest limit. His wife is an equally extreme example of a virtuous Christian wife and mother, while Valerie Marneffe represents the very quintessence of a courtesan. The same can be said about the friendship of the pathetic Pons and Schmucke (in *Le cousin Pons*), or about the

commercial honesty of the chief hero in *The Rise and Fall of César Birotteau*. The list could be prolonged indefinitely.

Such one-sided characters are exceptions in real life, but in the intensified life of Balzac's world they become the rule. Moreover, the clever juxtaposition of types, simplified down to their basic passions, increases the dynamics of conflicting wills and energies depicted in that world, although its arrangement may often look as if prompted by some social idea, or by a too deliberate logical plan. Balzac's hot imagination not only did not exclude a cold and calculating logic, but found in it as strong a counterpoise as in his analytical and observing power. Yet the frequent divergence between these three capacities of his is often responsible for a lack of organic union in his works. The imaginative, the reasoning and the observing Balzacs seem to work at times each on his own, even at the risk of disturbing one another. And each of them is inclined to overdo his own function in letting himself go—frequently to the reader's annoyance. As long as Balzac displays his imagination, he may delight the reader; but he only tires him when he indulges in much reasoning, or in too minute descriptions. And Balzac's descriptions are usually too minute and too thorough. He knows how to make the background a part of the characters; yet instead of evoking this background (as Dostoevsky evokes it in depicting Rogozhin's house, for example) in a few passages, he prefers to pile up one detail upon another, until we are in danger of overlooking the wood for the trees.

One of the successful instances of Balzac's descriptive power is that in which he introduces the reader to the shabby boarding house of Mme. Vauquer, together with its inhabitants, in *Le Père Goriot*. This is how he describes the dining-room alone : " The dining-room is panelled to the ceiling, and was once painted a colour that has grown dim, and makes a background for the different layers of dirt which have settled upon it and grouped themselves into fantastic patterns. The walls are lined with sticky sideboards, covered with cloudy, cracked decanters, basins of tin, and piles of thick, blue-bordered china plates that were manufactured at Tournai. In one corner there is a box with numbered compartments that serves to hold the boarders' napkins, spotted with grease and wine. Indestructible articles of furniture, banished from other places, are to be met with here, just as the ruins of civilisation are gathered together in a home for incurables. You will find here a barometer furnished with a Capuchin, that comes out when it rains ; some execrable engravings that take away your appetite, framed in varnished black wood, ornamented with gilt mouldings ; a dial of tortoiseshell, inlaid with copper, a green stove and some argand lamps, coated with oil and dust ; a long table covered with oil-cloth, on which the grease lies thick enough for a facetious boarder to write his name on it with his finger ; mutilated chairs and forlorn little straw mats that are always coming to pieces and yet are never destroyed ; and wretched charred foot-warmers with broken tops and loosened hinges. In order to explain in how great a degree this furniture is

old, cracked, rotten, ricketty, corroded, shabby, disabled, crippled and ruinous, I should be obliged to write a description that would diminish the interest of my readers, and that busy people could never forgive. The red floor is full of inequalities, produced by the waxing and the various coats of paint. In short, here poverty without poetry reigns supreme—shabby, economical, concentrated poverty. If it has not yet reached a condition of positive filth, it is equally dirty; if there are no absolute rags and tatters, everything will soon fall to pieces from rottenness.

"This room is to be seen in all its glory just at the moment when, towards seven o'clock in the morning, Madame Vauquer's cat precedes her mistress, and jumping along the sideboards, sniffs the milk that is contained in various bowls covered with saucers, and sets up her matutinal purr. The widow soon makes her appearance attired in a tulle cap, underneath which hangs a mass of ill-adjusted false hair; she comes in shuffling in her slippers, full of wrinkles. Her round, elderly face, in which the salient feature is a nose, shaped like the beak of a parrot, her little fat hands, her person plump as a partridge, and her gown that hangs loosely about her, are all in harmony with the room, reeking with squalor and infected with the love of sordid gain, the close, warm air of which she can breathe without disgust. Her face is fresh as the first frost of autumn, and the expression of her wrinkled eyes passes rapidly from the forced smile of an opera dancer to the harsh scowl of a bill discounter; in short, her whole personality explains her boarding house, as the boarding house suggests her personality.

The gaol cannot exist without the gaoler; you cannot imagine one without the other. The little woman's unwholesome plumpness is the product of her life, just as typhus is consequent upon the exhalations of a hospital. Her knitted wool under-petticoat sags below the outer one that is made from the stuff of an old gown, and through the rents of which the wadding is protruding; it sums up the parlour, dining-room and garden, announces the kitchen, and prepares us for the boarders. When Madame Vauquer is present, the spectacle is complete. She is about fifty years old, and resembles all *women who have had many troubles*. She has the glassy eye, and seemingly innocent expression of a procuress who will fly into a passion in order to obtain better terms, but, at the same time, is ready for any deed that will turn to her advantage, even to betray Georges or Pichegru, if Georges or Pichegru were here to be betrayed. Still her boarders, who believe her to have no money because they hear her moaning and groaning like themselves, declare her to be a *good creature at heart.*" (Quoted from the ed. publ. by Dent.)

V

It is easy to notice in Balzac's work a disproportion between his creative urge and his artistic gift. When these two are more or less balanced (in such novels as *Le Père Goriot, Eugénie Grandet,* or *Le cousin Pons*), he creates monumental masterpieces. After all, it was not for nothing that his admirer, Barbey d'Aurevilly, dared to proclaim him even greater than Shakespeare. Yet Balzac is truly great only at moments. Otherwise

he is one of the most uneven writers. And he is uneven precisely because his genius is much more creative than artistic. This is why he so often intermingles wonderful passages with endless discussions, with explanatory digressions, didactic asides, and hasty semi-scientific generalisations which disturb the compactness of the novel, and become moreover as dull at times as a Sunday sermon. His "social novels," such as *The Village Curé*, *The Country Doctor*, or his posthumous *Peasants*, are full of comments on various social problems—comments which are interpolated (particularly in the last two) rather than blended with the narrative. His style and language, too, are sometimes utterly careless and "journalistic." Yet even when failing to take the reader by his style, he impresses him by his vitality, his expansiveness, his broadness of interest, his uncanny analytical power, and by the depth of his intuition.

Balzac—like Dostoevsky—was fond of intricate plots, of crowded events, of piling up catastrophes, and of sudden transitions from one extreme to the other. He had a profound insight into human nature; but his insight was far from making an optimist out of him. He had no great opinion either of actual humanity, or of its future. Seeing in the great pageant of life only a contest of egoistic human wills and appetites on the one hand, and a mad St. Vitus dance round the Golden Calf on the other, he often abandoned himself to pessimism with rancorous relish. But while proclaiming the world "an ocean of mud where a man, putting his foot into it, must sink up to his neck," he was more than willing to snatch from life what he could in order to satisfy his

own appetites—above all his appetite for fame and power.

It was here that Balzac showed an even greater mixture of strength and weakness than in his art. For side by side with that heroic struggle which he waged against his personal circumstances, he also displayed many features of a self-complacent upstart. Only a few months before his death he married the Polish countess, Eveline Hanska, with whom he had been previously in correspondence for eighteen years, and on that occasion he wrote to Doctor Nacquart these eloquent lines (1850) : " This is a happy conclusion of a marriage denied, slandered by all envious people of the world ! I am now husband of the grand-niece of Maria Leczinska; brother-in-law of Count Rzewuski, the A.D.C. of His Majesty the Emperor of All Russia ; nephew of the Countess Rosalie Rzewuska, the first lady-in-waiting to Her Majesty the Empress . . ."

However, with all his faults, Balzac remains the great creator of the " Human Comedy," which concluded the period of romanticism while opening the gates to new creative means and methods. If Scott was the first to make the novel popular among the widest masses of readers, Balzac made of it the most important literary vehicle of modern civilisation. And that is what it has been ever since.

III

HEINRICH HEINE

I

HEINE's external biography is not complicated. Born at Düsseldorf, of Jewish parents, in 1797, he was first destined for a commercial career, but having no gifts in this direction, he took up law, which he studied in Bonn, Göttingen, Berlin, and again in Göttingen. He soon found law as boring as commerce, but he passed through the ordeals of examinations chiefly in order to oblige his wealthy Hamburg uncle, Solomon Heine, on whose financial support he remained dependent all his life. During his brief sojourn in Hamburg he fell in love with his cousin, Amalie, and her subsequent "treason" left a strong imprint upon Heine's heart and work. In 1825 he was baptised—a step which he took for practical reasons only.

His delightful causerie, *A Journey in the Harz* (*Harzreise*), which appeared in 1826, and *Book of Songs* (*Das Buch der Lieder*, 1827) made him at once famous all over Germany, without, however, settling his external affairs. After futile attempts to embrace a suitable occupation, he left his fatherland for Paris, where he lived from 1831 until his death (1856).

New impressions, aims and interests, which Heine

found in the French capital, made a considerable breach in his poetic production. His *New Poems*—a collection full of embittered and aggressive moods—appeared only in 1844. He stirred up his sarcastic vein also in his *Poems of the Time* (*Zeitgedichte*), and even more so in his Aristophanic satires *Germany* (*Deutschland*) and *Atta Troll.* Otherwise Heine's Parisian period was to a large extent publicistic. He became an able intermediary between French and German cultures, thus continuing the work of Mme. de Staël. Such witty causeries as *The Romantic School in Germany,* and *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,* were written originally for the French, with all the vivacity, ease and esprit peculiar to the French language. His collection of articles under the title *French Conditions* (*Französische Zustände*) is no less vivid informative journalism destined for the German public. Yet involved in various political and literary feuds, Heine tainted some of his writings with an irony which was as unscrupulous as it was personal. Journalism cannot be more malicious than some pages of his Italian *Travel Sketches* (those dealing with his poetic opponent, Count Platen), or his *Ludwig Boerne,* a pamphlet directed against his own dead comrade in the fight.

Being by nature as sensuous as he was sensitive, Heine found in Paris a proper ground to feed upon. He settled down to a kind of semi-married life with Eugénie Mirat, a simple Parisian grisette, who often figures as Mathilde in the poems of his last years. He married her officially only in 1841, and she never had the slightest notion of what a great poet her husband was. Heine's

ordinary course of life was, however, cut short by creeping paralysis, to which he fell a victim. From 1848 onwards he remained chained to his bed—to his "mattress grave," as he called it, and the sufferings he had to endure set an impress upon the work of his third period (1848–56). Its dominant mood is pessimism relieved by ironic wit, sometimes by cynical sallies and reminiscences. His poetic inspiration not only did not diminish, but seemed to be even stimulated by his illness. His *Romanzero* (1851, with its "Histories," "Lamentations" and "Hebrew Melodies") contains some of the best verses he ever wrote. The same can be said—with certain reservations—of his posthumous *Last Poems*. It is significant that during the last and most painful years of his life the former sceptic Heine adopted a half-hearted deism, but even God Himself did not escape his biting esprit. He died on February 17th, 1856.

II

It is difficult to understand Heine the poet without considering both his racial and his literary origin. He was a Jew by birth, and in spite of his cosmopolitan views, he never got rid of the complex and contradictory mentality of his race. Where, except perhaps in a Russian, are there so many contrasts jumbled together as there can be in a German Jew? He can accommodate extreme sensitiveness with extreme sensuality; the greatest intellectual refinement with cheap, malicious

jeering ; the depth of genuine emotion with a readiness to laugh at it. However self-centred he may be, he will rarely lose his grasp of reality ; and even his most idealistic fervour does not entirely save him from flashes of that over-practical attitude which knows the " price " of all things. As a son of an oppressed race, he is only too willing to side with the rebels ; but while fighting for a cause, bravely and enthusiastically, he will still secretly suspect both the cause and himself. His mind may be free of resentment ; yet a certain resentment, as well as fear, of a former pariah remains in his blood, marring at times even his most generous intentions by sudden meanness. Cautious in ordinary life almost to the verge of cowardice, he is heroic in endurance. He can go so far as to welcome pain, or even to inflict it upon himself and find in its very excess a sort of pleasure. The " inferiority-complex " which sticks, more or less, to all maltreated nations, often makes him either rancorously humble or rancorously self-assertive (as a reaction). And since his self-assertiveness is nearer to conceit than to real pride, it is as little dignified as his servile humility. He is able to achieve greatness only in tragedy ; it is here that he can reach the stature of an inspired prophet. Yet that very prophet may become a cynic, or a parodist of his own tragedy, as soon as he finds himself again in ordinary circumstances of life. Used to social " mimicry," he assumes with consummate versatility all sorts of masks and attitudes, while secretly he chuckles at them, at himself and at his spectators. He is much too observant and too " informed " to be able to take for granted anyone

or anything ; and as soon as he feels safe, he may even find a peculiar pleasure in exposing the usual " way of the world " with the laughter of a court fool or a tragic buffoon. Still, one never knows where the buffoon in him ends and the martyr begins.

It needs the psychic vitality of a Jew to embody so many contrasts without becoming their victim. Heine was typical in this respect ; only he was in addition a poetic genius—filtered through German culture and German romanticism. For so far as his literary pedigree is concerned, he was a child of romanticism, in spite of the fact that he became its " grave digger." While studying in Bonn, he was actually in touch with its official leader, August W. Schlegel, to whom he dedicated one of his early sonnets. The truth, however, is that no European poet combines so much romantic temperament with so much anti-romantic intellect as Heine. Sometimes he strikes one as Werther and Mephistopheles in one person, and his very originality comes largely from a peculiar mixture of these two extremes, which mark already his *Book of Songs.*

Certain parts of this collection are the very apex of German romanticism, with its sighs and moonlit nights, its roses and nightingales, its ghouls and ghosts. What can be more romantic than its opening section, " Dream Images," or more sentimental *schmerz* than some of its love lyrics ? Yet the genuine ring of his emotions is often disturbed by sudden ironic chuckles, his tenderness by light-hearted frivolity, and his spontaneous ease by devices resembling deliberate affectations which he himself is ready to make fun of. When-

ever the burden of his own sensitiveness becomes too oppressive, he puts on the garb of a harlequin, as if expecting to be healed by his own laughter. In his "Fresco Sonnets to Christian S," Heine explains his laughter as that of a disappointed romanticist whose heart has been *zerrissen und zerschnitten und zerstochen* (torn and cut and pierced); but on the whole, his romantic *Weltschmerz*, which he tried to mask and to alleviate, was only one of its sources. Quite apart from this, he needed his laughter as a weapon in his fight with others, as well as with himself.

The jeering and laughing malice of which he was capable when fighting with his opponents is known to all his readers. Less clear is perhaps the fact that Heine often used his aggressive irony as a foil against his own emotions. It is difficult to say whether the "snub" by his cousin Amalie was alone responsible for it, but the fact remains that the memory of it always stirred up not only his saddest but also his most revengeful strains. No sooner had he abandoned himself to his melancholy than he pulled himself together by what he calls *das schöne, gelle Lachen*, charged with cruel sarcasms, and sometimes with the "asides" of a cynical boulevardier. Heine, in whom love and sex were entirely separated, was as much voluptuous as he was sentimental. He was in essence a sentimental sensualist—perhaps the greatest in European poetry; and whenever he felt in too great a danger from his sentimentality, he found his best allies against it in his own ironic and sensuous temper.

Owing to the divorce between love and sex within his

own consciousness, Heine never knew the spontaneous wholeness of pagan erotics, although he was fond of flirting with his own " paganism." Such wholeness is possible only before that divorce ; and since Heine's eroticism was of a complicated antinomic kind, his sensuous pleasures turned into acute suffering on that plane which was above and beyond them. His love was like that symbolic Sphinx of his (in the preface to the third edition of his *Book of Songs*) which lacerates one's heart, while giving one all the " bliss " of voluptuousness.

" Oh exquisite torture, rapturous wounds !
The pain and the pleasure unending—
For while I was thrilled with the kiss of her mouth
The claws were tearing and rending."[1]

Such an attitude was made even more difficult by his contradictory " Jewish " nature on the one hand, and by his resentment with regard to Amalie on the other. The latter may have influenced Heine's opinion of women in general, an opinion to which he gave vent also in this poem, called *A Woman* :[1]

" They loved each other beyond belief—
She was a strumpet, he was a thief ;
Whenever she thought of his tricks, thereafter
She'd throw herself on the bed with laughter.

The day was spent with reckless zest ;
At night she lay upon his breast.
So when they took him, a moment after,
She watched at the window—with laughter.

[1] Translated by Louis Untermeyer in the *Poems of Heinrich Heine*. (Routledge).

He sent word pleading, ' Oh come to me,
I need you, need you bitterly,
Yes, here and in the hereafter.'
Her little head shook with laughter.

At six in the morning they swung him high ;
At seven the turf on his grave was dry ;
At eight, however, she quaffed her
Red wine and sang with laughter."

III

If this be an example of Heine's sarcastic vein, the other extreme is his lyrical tenderness, freshness and simplicity, reminding one of genuine folk-song. It sounds rather paradoxical that Heine, who had not a drop of German blood and dared to throw moreover some of his most poisoned arrows at the rising German nationalism, managed to absorb (as distinct from imitating) in his own poetry the style and the spirit of the German folk-song more convincingly than any other poet, except Goethe. He knew how to impart the accent and the spontaneity of the folk-song even to his most involved emotions. This blending of simplicity and refinement lends a peculiar piquancy to some of his lyrics and *romanzes*. Is it possible to imagine a finer approach to the folk-song than his " Lorelei," or his " Pilgrimage to Kevlaar "—the two gems which are as difficult to translate as the poems of Burns or of Koltsov ? And how many similar gems are scattered by him not only in his *Book of Songs*, but also in his later collections ! The skill with which he could combine the laconic method of the folk-song with conscious poetic craft at its best he retained to the end. We

certainly find it in such an example as the one taken from his *New Poems*:

"There was an old, old king once,
His heart was heavy, grey was his head.
What must he do, the poor old king,
But marry a young maid.

There was a handsome page once,
His hair was golden, his glance was keen;
He carried the train, the silken train
Of the young queen.

It is an old, old story
And sad and sweet to hear and to tell:
They had to die together,
They loved each other too well." [1]

He can be equally laconic, simple and suggestive, when using the symbolism of nature, as we see in his world-known poem about the palm and the pine:

"A pine tree stands so lonely
In the North where the high winds blow,
He sleeps; and the whitest blanket
Wraps him in ice and snow.

He dreams—dreams of a palm tree
That far in an Orient land
Languishes, lonely and drooping
Upon the burning sand." [2]

Heine's romantic vein comes out especially in his attitude towards Nature. He is interested in her in so far as he can transfer to, or interpret through her his own subjective moods. He may often have recourse

[1] Translated by Rose Fyleman.
[2] Translated by Louis Untermeyer.

to various ready-made *clichés*, such as roses, nightingales, the pale moon, etc., but he makes up for this by the originality of his melody, by his accent and his unforgettable twinkle. With all the simplicity of its external garb, his phrasing abounds in capricious cadences, in musical dissonances, in sudden changes of mood, in "grimaces" of words, and in those subtle zig-zagging rhythms which can perhaps best convey our modern, our nervous sensibility. But he can also rise to grandeur and to that visionary pathos which vibrates —with all the rhythmic sweep of its free verse—in his "North Sea" cycle. Take his sonorous "Greeting to the Sea" (Thalatta! Thalatta!), his "Night on the Shore," or even his "Twilight," with its *andante* mood and manner (translated by Kate F. Kröcker):

"By the dim sea-shore
Lonely I sat, and thought afflicted.
The sun sank low, and sinking he shed
Rose and vermilion upon the waters,
And the white foaming waves,
Urged on by the tide,
Foamed and murmured yet nearer and nearer—
A curious jumble of whispering and wailing,
Of soft rippling laughter and sobbing and sighing,
And in between all a low lullaby singing.
Methought I heard ancient forgotten legends
And world-old sweet stories,
Which once as a boy
I heard from my playmates,
When, of a summer's evening,
We crouched down to tell stories
With small listening hearts,
And bright curious eyes:
While the big grown-up girls
Were sitting opposite
At flowery and fragrant windows,
Their rosy faces
Smiling and moonshine-illumined."

Heine is perhaps most himself when the sentimental romanticist in him joins company with his own Mephistopheles, improvising those sudden transitions from the tragic to the frivolous, from the pathetic to the grotesque, which make his Muse look so entrancingly light-hearted and original. He is fond of arresting the flow of his rhymes by a pungent hint, by a sudden ironical outburst, or by a grotesque simile, making thus many a poem unique by its very incongruity. Thus the solemn music of his "North Sea" poems is interrupted by a passage such as this ("Night on the Beach"):

> "Starless and cold is the night;
> Old Ocean yawns,
> And flat on the ocean, upon his belly,
> Squats the uncouth North Wind,
> And stealthily croaking, with groan and with grunt,
> Like a crotchety grumbler waxing good-humoured,
> He babbles into the waters
> Mad tales without number."

And what a gorgeously grotesque finale is the concluding piece, "In the Haven," which raises drunkenness itself (in a literal sense) to the level of high poetry. Heine has no equal in mixing earnest with fun, emotion with ironical sallies. His irony may often be as cruel as it is stinging, yet the very pathos of some of his verses is due to his clever mixture of tragedy with sarcastic vulgar detail. So in his "Vale of Tears" (*The Last Poems*) two poor lovers die in a garret from cold and starvation. The police inspector and the parish doctor come in the morning, and the poem finishes

with the doctor's idiotic report (translated by Sir T. Martin) :

> " The cruel weather," said his report,
> " Combined with inanition,
> Has caused the collapse of both—at least,
> Has hastened that condition.
>
> " When frosts set in," he went on to say,
> " 'Tis vital the body should
> Be protected by woollen blankets—likewise
> Be nourished by wholesome food."

The marriage of poetry and conversational ease, of emotion and irony, of sincerity and mummery, takes in Heine's art a spontaneous, capricious, and elegantly negligent surface. He often assumes even too easy a manner in the company of Muses—like a true boulevardier of Parnassus. But we must not be beguiled by it, for underneath his external ease and nonchalance one can discover an almost incredible conscious craft by means of which he strives to produce the desired nuance, the appropriate cadence, the most impressive pattern of words. This is partly true also of his prose with its fireworks of wit, its uneven tempo and its almost disturbing nervous fluency. Its proper symbol would be a spoilt, affected, and exceedingly fascinating courtesan whose wit and laughter are all the more malicious the more she wants to forget, as it were, her own painful position.

Capable of laughing at himself, Heine could afford to laugh at everything—although there may be a jarring ring in his laughter. But during the last painful years of his life, while awaiting death in his " mattress

grave," he turned his laughter into a weapon against his own fate. His heroism of that period looks even greater by reason of its apparent flippancy. Can the union of frivolity and of secret defiance go farther than in his amusing poem, " Body and Soul," to mention only one of the many examples ? And even his verses " For the Mouche," dictated by him to his last and most tenderly loved sweetheart only a few hours before his death, have lines full of such humorous sarcasms as mark the gayest products of his genius.

IV

Heine's poetry began as a part of the German romantic school, and ended as its dangerous dissolvent. Heine was destined by his very nature to become the " grave-digger " of German romanticism. He killed it partly by the excess of his own " romantic irony," and partly by using his poetry as a whip against Philistinism on the one hand, and against the reactionary political conditions in Germany on the other.

It was only in his voluntary exile in Paris that he was allowed to breathe freely and to become one of the champions of European liberty. Before that, however, he had to endure all the weight of the general European reaction steered by its evil genius, the Prince Metternich. Germany of the 'twenties and 'thirties was suffocating under it, while the vigilant censorship took care that the muffled voices of the opposition should not disturb the general peace and " order." All wider horizons were closed, all ambitions thwarted or drowned

in that dull and stagnant Philistinism which Heine portrayed in his "Anno 1829" (*Dass ich bequem verbluten kann*):

"Give me a nobler, wider field,
Where I, at least, can bleed to death!
Oh, do not let me stifle here
Among these hucksters. Give me breath!

They eat and drink with greedy haste,
Dull and complacent as the mole;
Their generosity is large—
As large as, say, the poor-box hole.

Cigar in mouth they stroll along,
Their hands are fat with many a gem;
Their stomachs are both huge and strong—
But who could ever stomach *them!*

They deal in spices, but the air
Is filled, alas, with something else;
Even their souls pollute the streets
And foul them with their fishy smells.

If they but had some human vice,
Some lust too terrible to see—
But not these flabby virtues, not
This cheap and smug morality!"[1]

No wonder that the younger generation began to find the air too heavy. Already in the later 'twenties they brought into literature an increase in irony, in pessimism, and also a sarcastic attitude towards prevailing conditions. Detached romanticism with its fantasies, its medieval dust and dreams, could no longer satisfy the needs. One began to demand a literature which would be nearer to life, and the interest in realistic

[1] Translated by Louis Untermeyer. *Ibid.*

motives was growing. The actual turn of the tide set in, however, after the July revolution of 1830, which stirred up many a dissatisfied mind in Germany also. The new political and social ideas penetrated into that country more like a draught than a wind, yet they fostered the desire for fresh air. Literature itself took up the task of spreading them, particularly the "Young Germany" movement. The most conspicuous figures in this movement were Boerne and Heine—both of them converted Jews and exiles.

Heine's fight for political freedom, for democracy, for cosmopolitan liberalism is well known. His laughter did more good in that fight than thousands of solemn exhortations could ever have done. "I have lit you through the darkness; and when the battle began, I fought in the first rank and led you on." This is what he says of himself, and he is right. Yet, however much one appreciates Heine's efforts in this direction, one cannot help suspecting that the spirit of protest as such meant more to him than any ideal. He may have ranged himself on the side of the rebels, but his revolutionary fervour was hardly strong enough to make him lose his circumspection, or even his ironical attitude to the cause adopted by him. More than once he showed the anti-democratic self-assertiveness of an individual who is conscious of being not the rule, but an exception. It is known also that his enthusiasm of 1830 had considerably cooled down by 1848, for he found the upheaval of that year little to his taste.

The confusion becomes even greater when one scrutinises and tries to disentangle Heine's ideal-

istic impulses from his innate and perhaps incurable opportunism. He never seemed to worry about scruples when his personal interests were in question. Already during his first intensely liberal period he had not shrunk from trying to ingratiate himself, while in Munich (1827), even with the all-powerful conservative clergy of the Bavarian capital. And only a few months later he wrote to his Munich publisher, Cotta : " It will gratify me if you will kindly explain to the king that the author is far more peaceful, better and quite different from his previous work . . . " In Paris again, he saw, in spite of his flirtation with revolutionary socialism, no objection to his drawing from the French Government a secret yearly subsidy of 4,800 francs, which was cut short only in 1848.

This does not mean that Heine was insincere, but only that he was unstable, full of contradictory impulses, and much too complex as a personality to be quite reliable as a " character." His indignant fury was one of the salutary forces of the time ; only the motives behind it were too often those of personal rancour. This is why Heine's invectives and polemics have so little charity and chivalry. He seized upon every possible means by which to overwhelm and strike down his enemy : malice, slander, sarcasm, nasty allusions, deliberate lies even—they were all welcomed so long as they could serve his purpose.

With all this he is a great poetic genius. It is enough to read a few of his verses in order to feel that peculiar magic which descends only upon the elect, and which can never be acquired by toil or by the mere will to be

a poet. And since Heine's art was primarily the result of his complicated personality, there remains nothing but to thank the gods for having given him so much genius—even if he had to pay for it by his " character." His life may not have been great, yet he transmuted its very lack of greatness into great poetry.

IV

IVAN TURGENEV

I

THERE is something miraculous in the rapid rise of modern Russian letters to one of the literary great powers—particularly when one considers the fact that only two hundred years ago Russia hardly possessed any literature in a European sense. Owing to the reforms of Peter the Great, Russia became active also in the literary field, but for a century she remained only a talented apprentice and imitator. It was Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) who laid at last firm foundations for a national literature on a broad scale. Michael Lermontov, the most "Byronic" Russian poet, supplemented the Apollonian genius of Pushkin by bringing in rebellious and introspective elements, while the self-tormented seeker, Nikolai Gogol, introduced some of those "realistic" themes which stimulated the growing Russian prose. In the 'twenties and early 'thirties of the last century, Russian poetry already had reached its climax of perfection. In the 'forties, however, prose began to rise at the expense of poetry, and this wave went on until it reached its summit in the monumental realism of Turgenev,

Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and others. The impetus of this realism subsided in the 'eighties—only in order to rise anew (although not to the same height) later on, in the works of Chekhov, Gorky, and of various "modernists."

Many features of what is known as Russian realism are due to the fact that the majority of Russian writers of the last century belonged to that privileged class of landed gentry which, until the reform of 1861, lived on the compulsory labour of serfs. Serfdom, on the one hand, and a superior culture of their own, on the other, made this class an alien caste among the Russian peasant masses with whom it had nothing in common. The futile "superfluous man" thus became one of the most familiar figures in Russian literature. Already Pushkin embodied him in his *Eugene Onyegin*, while Lermontov did the same in Pechorin (*The Hero of our Days*). In later writers we find all the varieties of this type—particularly in Goncharov's *Oblomov*, in the works of Turgenev and of Chekhov. True, soon after the abortive Decembrist rising of 1825, the cultured gentry began to expand into the growing classless "intelligentsia"; but this unique social hybrid had as little in common with the bulk of the nation as it had with the governing class of Russia. All the same, one of the first important tasks of the Russian "intelligentsia" was the liberation of the serfs, and after this had been achieved (in 1861), the filling up of the gulf between the intellectuals and the people. Many "populists" of the 'seventies gave up their aristocratic privileges and went over to the folk-masses

in order to help the backward *moujik*, or even to merge with him. "Intelligentsia and the people" became one of Russia's acutest problems, a problem which the recent revolution solved by simply wiping out most of the former intellectuals as an alien body.

All the questions concerning the cultural life of Russia were in the hands of the intellectuals. And the controversies were often exceedingly sharp and bitter, the more so because the intelligentsia were divided into two hostile groups: the Slavophils who stood for a national cultural individuality and mission of Russia, and the Westerners who championed Western European ideas, institutions and ways of life. It goes without saying that the Slavophils were mainly landed aristocrats, imbued with religious and class traditions; among the Westerners, on the other hand, we find a large number of "plebeians." This split marks the culture of all nineteenth-century Russia, and the question whether she will go in with Europe or against Europe is not yet settled. Even since the revolution a strong "Euro-Asiatic" tendency has become prominent, and its attitude towards the European West reminds one partly of Slavophilism, modified by new tasks, new requirements and conditions.

Without a preliminary knowledge of these facts, a proper understanding of modern Russian literature is almost impossible. And this is particularly the case when one deals with such a writer as Ivan Turgenev.

II

Turgenev was above all a cultured representative of the Russian landed gentry. Born in 1818, he studied for a while at the University of Moscow, then in Petersburg, and later (1838–41) in Berlin, where he became an enthusiastic admirer of Germany and of Western Europe. After his return from Germany he took an active part in literature, but his first efforts were only tentative. For a while he seemed to be wavering between poetry, drama and prose. He achieved a considerable success with his longer poetic narrative *Parasha* (1843), written under the influence of Pushkin and Lermontov. Also some of his first stories show leanings towards Lermontov and towards Gogol's "philanthropic" themes (*Moomoo*, 1852). In his plays, however, such as *A Month in the Country* (1850), and *A Provincial Lady* (1851), he showed a fair amount of originality, particularly in the first, which anticipates, in a way, the plays of Chekhov. It was during his period of seeking and groping that he began to write his *Sportsman's Sketches*, which appeared in a separate edition in 1852.

This work was a new departure with regard to both matter and manner. The subject matter was mainly the serf—the serf in his own surrounding, and also in his relationship to his master. As the liberation of the serfs was generally anticipated, such a theme was then topical. Several minor writers treated it in a philanthropic-sentimental way. Turgenev struck, however, a different note. Being an enthusiastic

sportsman, he jotted down casual episodes, meetings and impressions which he worked into a fine mosaic of Russian rural life. Now and then he tried to be introspective, but as a rule he remained only an observer. It is easy to see that Turgenev himself silently sympathises with the peasant, and silently condemns the landowner; but treating his themes as an artist, he abstains from all preaching or propaganda. At the same time he permeates his jottings with ease and grace, with delicate simplicity, and with descriptions of nature which are full of original touches even when their subject matter is conventional. Turgenev's landscape is usually imbued with a tender personal intimacy. He has an eye for shades and for lyrical details which would escape an average observer, and whenever he works in this medium we delight in it as we would delight in watching the progress of an exquisite pastel drawing.

"It was a glorious July day, one of those days which only come after many days of fine weather. From earliest morning the sky is clear: the sunrise does not glow with fire; it is suffused with a soft, roseate flush. The sun, not fiery, not red-hot as in time of stifling drought, not dull purple as before a storm, but with a bright and genial radiance, rises peacefully behind a long and narrow cloud, shines out freshly and plunges again into its lilac mist. The delicate upper edge of the strip of cloud flashes in little gleaming snakes; their brilliance is like polished silver. But, lo! the dancing rays flash forth again, and in solemn joy, as though flying upward, rises the mighty orb. About mid-day there is wont to be high up in the sky, a multitude of

rounded clouds, golden-grey, with soft white edges. Like islands scattered over an overflowing river, that bathes them in its unbroken reaches of deep, transparent blue, they scarcely stir; farther down in the heavens, they are in movement, packing closer; now there is no blue to be seen between them, but they are themselves almost as blue as the sky, filled full with light and heat. The colour of the horizon, a faint, pale lilac, does not change all day, and is the same all round; nowhere is there storm gathering and darkening; only somewhere rays of bluish colour stretch down from the sky; it is a sprinkling of scarce perceptible rain. In the evening these clouds disappear, the last of them, blackish and undefined as smoke, lie streaked with pink, facing the setting sun; in the place where it has gone down, as calmly as it rose, a crimson glow lingers long over the darkening earth, and, softly flashing like a candle carried carelessly, the evening star flickers in the sky. On such days all the colours are softened, bright but not glaring; everything is suffused with a kind of touching tenderness. On such days the heat is sometimes very great; often it is even 'steaming' on the slopes of the fields, but a wind dispels this growing sultriness, and whirling eddies of dust—sure sign of settled fine weather—move along the roads and across the fields in high white columns. In the pure dry air there is a scent of wormwood, rye in blossom, and buckwheat; even an hour before nightfall there is no moisture in the air."[1]

[1] From "Byezhim Prairie," *A Sportsman's Sketches*, tr. by Mrs. Constance Garnett (Heinemann).

This is an example of how Turgenev treats even such worn-out subjects as sunrise and sunset. The poetic qualities of the vast Russian countryside have in him one of their best "impressionist" interpreters. But he is a great interpreter of human nature as well. As a keen observer, he is supreme when he simply describes what he sees or visualises. And the more laconic and delicate his description the more incisively is the character rendered. He can make a whole crowd of people alive simply by pointing out various trifles typical of each of them. As a proof can serve this casual passage from his "Hamlet of the Shchigri District" (*A Sportsman's Sketches*, II):

"On parting from my host, I began walking through the rooms. Almost all the guests were utterly unknown to me: about twenty persons were already seated at the card-tables. Among these devotees of preference were two warriors, with aristocratic but rather battered countenances, a few civilian officials, with tight cravats and drooping dyed moustaches, such as are only to be found in persons of resolute character and strict conservative opinions: these conservative persons picked up their cards with dignity, and, without turning their heads, glared sideways at everyone who approached; and five or six local petty officials, with fair round bellies, fat, moist little hands, and staid immovable little legs. These worthies spoke in a subdued voice, smiled benignly in all directions, held their cards close up to their very shirt-fronts and when they trumped did not flap their cards on the table, but, on the contrary,

shed them with an undulatory motion on the green cloth, and packed their tricks together, with a slight, unassuming, and decorous swish. The rest of the company were sitting on sofas, or hanging in groups about the doors or at the windows; one gentleman, no longer young, though of feminine appearance, stood in a corner, fidgeting, blushing, and twisting the seal of his watch over his stomach in his embarrassment, though no one was paying any attention to him; some others in swallow-tail coats and checked trousers, were talking together with extraordinary ease and liveliness, turning their bald, greasy heads from side to side unconstrainedly as they talked; a young man of twenty, short-sighted and fair-haired, dressed from head to foot in black, obviously shy, smiled sarcastically. . . . Voinitsin led me up to a little man, with a high tuft of hair on his forehead and moustaches, in a cinnamon-coloured frock coat and striped cravat. His yellow, mobile features were certainly full of cleverness and sarcasm. His lips were perpetually curved in a flitting ironical smile; little black eyes, screwed up with an impudent expression, looked out from under uneven lashes. Beside him stood a country gentleman, broad, soft, and sweet—a veritable sugar-and-honey mixture —with one eye. He laughed in anticipation at the witticisms of the little man, and seemed positively melting with delight."

And this is the way Turgenev introduces to us the hero of one of his other sketches: "His face, plump and round as a ball, expressed bashfulness, good-nature, and humble meekness; his nose, also plump and round and

streaked with blue veins, betokened a sensualist. On the front of his head there was not a single hair left, some thin brown tufts stuck out behind ; there was an ingratiating twinkle in his little eyes, set in long slits, and a sweet smile on his red, juicy lips. He had on a coat with a stand-up collar and brass buttons, very worn but clean ; his cloth trousers were hitched up high, his fat calves were visible above the yellow tops of his boots."[1]

We need not multiply the illustrations. Each of his works offers them abundantly, provided we know how to read them. Unobtrusive character drawings, poetic impressionism, an easy development of the narrative, a sense for shades, and a musical language which is restrained and yet saturated with content—all this is blended in Turgenev's prose which is among the finest in European literature.

III

Turgenev's vision is always concrete. As Henry James points out in one of his notes, Turgenev "has no recognition of unembodied ideas ; an idea, with him, is such and such a nose and chin, such and such a hat and waistcoat, bearing the same relation to it as the look of the printed word does to its meaning." And Turgenev himself says in a paper that he " had never attempted to create a type without having, not an idea, but a living person, in whom the various elements were harmonised together, to work from." Turgenev is thus

[1] Translated by Mrs. Constance Garnett (Heinemann).

a born realist. Having more observation than imagination, he depends above all on what he sees. Dostoevsky describes his characters chiefly from within ; Tolstoy balances his acute eye with an equally acute analysis. But Turgenev shows the surface only, and with a few touches he suggests the rest, preferably without any analysing process as such. But what distinguishes him from so many other Russian writers, is his sense of construction, of proportion, and of plot. The last feature is perhaps less conspicuous in his *Sportsman's Sketches* than in his subsequent stories, or in his novels which, for convenience's sake, can be divided into three groups. The first group comprises the novels dealing with life and characters among the Russian gentry, without any social or political *arrière pensé*. *Rudin* (1855) and *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1858) are in this category. Then comes Turgenev's central and greatest novel, *Fathers and Children* (1861), which is a supreme example of the organic blending of form and "idea"; of the artistic with the social significance of a work of art. Finally can be mentioned his *On the Eve* (1860), *Smoke* (1867) and *Virgin Soil* (1876), in which this blending is less organic.

These novels reveal to us not only Turgenev's method, taste and talent, but largely also his own dominant mood—that of a refined and uprooted Russian gentleman, sapped by a poetic scepticism and always glad to take the line of least resistance. Being a representative of that gentry culture which began to sense already its own blind-alley, he looked with tender melancholy both on the traditions and

the " superfluous " types of his own class. As early as 1851 he wrote his *Diary of a Superfluous Man*, and since then this unheroic hero remained one of his favourite figures. Rudin certainly is one of them. He is a kind of Onyegin of the idealistic 'forties—a pathetic Russian Hamlet who is gifted and full of noble impulses, yet being utterly devoid of will-power, never achieves anything and becomes a victim of his own versatile many-sidedness.

Rudin is one of the most amazing portrait paintings in Russian literature. We meet him first in the drawing-room of a country residence where he strikes everyone by his clever talk, by his ideas, and his sincerity. Then, to our surprise, we find out that this brilliant talker is a parasite and a sponger. All sorts of contradictory features follow each other, until he is subjected to a last test, in his love of Natasha—an episode in which he shows his fundamental lack of real courage and backbone. The author makes us waver all the time between admiration, spite and pity. Each new characteristic of Rudin perplexes us as if it could not belong to the man we seem to know already. But we are compelled to shift our opinion again and again, and finally all these contradictions shape themselves into a strange and yet convincing human figure. Turgenev achieves this only as an observer—by his artistic tact and by that suggestive reserve which is one of his great qualities.

If Rudin be a pathetic descendant of Onyegin, the young Natasha has affinities with Pushkin's Tatyana, the heroine of *Eugene Onyegin*. Strong and yet

womanly, healthy in her idealism, brave in her tenderness—such is Natasha. Of a similar type is Liza whom we find in Turgenev's next novel, *A Nest of Gentlefolk*. This work, too, draws a series of portrait against the background of the gentry life in the 'forties Its main theme is a love tragedy pure and simple. Liza falls in love with a disillusioned married man, Lavretsky. On hearing that Lavretsky's wife has died in France, they both confess their mutual love ; but when their happiness is at its height, the woman suddenly returns—the rumour of her death having been false. The end is analogous to that of *Eugene Onyegin :* in the conflict between duty and happiness, Liza is on the side of duty. Finally she buries herself in a convent.

The "conventional" subject is worked out by Turgenev in a symphonic manner, with numerous motives, episodes and characters held together by the basic theme. The plot, the contrasted characters, the background and the "atmosphere" merge so organically that the novel looks too smooth at times and too much distilled, as it were. Turgenev's chronic mood of gentle fatalism pervades it to the end. And as for Liza, she embodies all that is best in a loving woman. Although idealised, she is alive and devoid of mawkishness. This cannot be said, however, in the same measure of Helena, the heroine of *On the Eve*—a novel in which Turgenev portrayed the young generation of the 'fifties. Here he made also his first attempt to get beyond the passive "superfluous man" by creating a strong hero. He chose for that purpose not a Russian even, but a Bulgarian. Unfortunately,

he failed to make him really convincing ; there is something forced in Insarov, and Helena's virtues, too are overdone. Otherwise, Turgenev shows again much of his habitual skill, although the novel as a whole abounds in " topical " discussions, some of which are added rather than inevitable. Turgenev followed in this respect the general fashion of the 'sixties and 'seventies when the so-called social and political note became obligatory in fiction and even in poetry. It was only in his next work, *Fathers and Children*, that he blended the social and the artistic elements in perfect proportion. Moreover, he managed to draw in it, for the first and last time, a real strong man—the nihilist,[1] Bazarov.

Few figures in fiction have raised so many discussions in Russia as Bazarov. Turgenev, who wanted to confront the dreamy generation of the 'forties with the realistic and active youths of the 'sixties (the years of great reforms), chose for his main character a young " plebeian." Without traditions, without respect for abstract ideas or ideals, for ranks or titles, Bazarov cares only for facts. He is hard-working, full of will and vitality, brutally matter-of-fact, uncouth, aggressive, frank and free. One can imagine what an impression he makes when arriving in a typical " nest of gentlefolk " with its polite, " Victorian " owners. Various conflicts—hidden and open ones—soon arise, conflicts in which Turgenev's tact almost surpasses itself in finesse of touch and of suggestion. The work certainly is overpowering throughout and most of all in

[1] The word " nihilist " was coined by Turgenev.

the scene of Bazarov's death—one of the grandest scenes in modern literature. The contrast between Bazarov's heroic resignation and the mad despair of his parents, who are so pathetically trying to conceal it before their dying son, is one of those marvels of art which are more real than reality itself.

As in his previous works, Turgenev weaves here, too, a perfect pattern by confronting opposite characters in the same way as one puts together opposite but complementary colours in order to make a harmonious picture. Bazarov himself is drawn with such objectivity that we often do not know whether we find him sympathetic or not. Even when he repels us by his ruthlessness we cannot help being fascinated by him. He undoubtedly fascinated Turgenev himself, whose character was rather like that of Bazarov's will-less and a bit too " tame " friend, Arkady.

Together with this, the novel is a picture of the Russian *zeitgeist* with country life as a background. It is also a gallery of finely delineated characters, and these seem to impress all the more the reader's mind and memory the more unobtrusively they are suggested by the author. Arkady's father and uncle, Bazarov's parents, Arkady, the shy Fenetchka, the clever but repressed Mme. Odintsov, and her gentle sister Katya—they are all alive and inevitable even in their most casual words and movements. The novel is permeated with the atmosphere of the 'sixties ; but through this atmosphere we can easily perceive the eternal tragic-comedy of human relations as a whole : the relations between children and parents, men and women, aristocrats and

plebeians, dreamers and realists, leaders and followers. The truth of life is not distorted but only deepened by the truth of art.

IV

The storm raised by *Fathers and Children* brought so much disgust to its author that for a while he intended to give up literature. This mood is reflected in his lyrical autobiographic improvisation, *Enough* (1864). Life seemed to have lost, in his eyes, all flavour and content. "The most terrible thing is that there is nothing terrible in life; that the very essence of life is pettily-uninteresting and beggarly-flat." This short sentence sums up his inner weariness and pessimism which may have been partly due also to his strange infatuation for the famous singer Mme. Viardot-Garcia. Turgenev met her in his twenties, in Petersburg, and this virile and practical woman remained his lifelong love, although to all appearances their relationship was purely platonic. The enamoured writer followed her and her husband to Germany, to Paris. It was for her sake that he spent so many of his later years abroad, chiefly in Germany and in France.

His restless and aimless wanderings made him even more uprooted. At the same time he was less out of touch with what was going on in Russia than some of his critics are inclined to believe. Turgenev the artist was above parties, but as a citizen he was keenly interested in the political life of his own country. Being a convinced Westerner, he stood for all that he considered advanced and progressive. As he was never afraid of

uttering his views in print, he had to face violent opponents from the Slavophil camp. The severest of them was Dostoevsky, who did not even shrink from caricaturing him—as the writer Karmazinov—in his great and gruesome novel, *The Possessed*. The controversy between the two parties found an echo in Turgenev's last two novels, *Smoke*, and *Virgin Soil*. In the first of them he flared up, after his *Enough* and his long period of resignation, attacking the empty upper caste. But in his very attacks and sarcasms there is a note of embittered weariness which tries to overcome itself. As a work of art the novel is uneven. The political satire as such looms large at the expense of the finely conceived romance between Litvinov (another of his uprooted heroes) and Irina. Yet as a portraitist, Turgenev achieves here one of his greatest triumphs, precisely with Irina—a more complex and more subtle personality than any of his previous women. Mr. Edward Garnett is right in defining her[1] as a woman with " that exact balance between good and evil which makes good women seem insipid beside her and bad women unnatural. She ardently desires to become nobler, to possess all that the ideal of love means for the heart of a woman ; but she has only the power given to her of enervating the man she loves. She is born to corrupt, yet never to be corrupted. She rises mistress of herself after the first measure of fatal delight. And, never giving her whole heart absolutely to her lover, she nevertheless remains ever to be desired. Further, her wit, her scorn, her beauty, preserve her from all the

[1] In *Turgenev* (Collins).

influences of evil she does not deliberately employ. Such a woman is as old and as rare a type as Helen of Troy."

Powerful and skilful in detail, *Smoke* is less compact as a whole than Turgenev's best novels. The same can be said of *Virgin Soil*, a work in which he made a new attempt at portraying a strong man—this time in connection with the revolutionary "populist" movement of the 'seventies. He obviously wanted to prove that he was able, not only to follow, but also to interpret the aspirations of the radical, or ultra-radical, currents in his country. Once more he tried to blend the "social" and the artistic sides of his novel, and he nearly succeeded. In several descriptions and portrayings we find Turgenev at his best; but with all this we feel in the work a certain strain. In addition, its central character, the "strong man," Solomin, is too much of a puppet. He often looks like a clever abstraction of a sober, reliable, devoted and practical man. He is a Bazarov made altruistic, and at the same time deprived of blood, as well as of that touch which distinguishes a living character from a "made" one. That is why Solomin is a cousin of Insarov rather than of Bazarov. Most other figures are, however, alive and convincing. Take the active Marianna (a kind of elder sister to Natasha turned revolutionary), Nezhdanov—a new variation of the Rudin type, or even Sipyagin, who embodies the very quintessence of a bureaucratic opportunist: in this case, a "progressive" one.

What strikes one about Turgenev's last two novels is the bitter criticism of his own country. As a Westerner, he hated its despotic rule, its indolence, its sloth and

drunkenness. An apotheosis of his attitude we find in Nezhdanov's allegoric poem called *A Dream*. It finishes with these lines :

" The peasants sleep like the dead ; they reap and plough asleep, they thresh
And yet they sleep. Father, mother, all the family, all sleep.
He who strikes sleeps, and he who receives the blow !
Only the tavern is wakeful—and never closes its eyes :
And, clasping a whisky-pot with a firm grip,
Her forehead at the Pole and her feet in the Caucasus,
Sleeps a never-ending sleep our country, our holy Russia."

Turgenev described various aspects of Russia just at the moment when this sleeping Colossus was rubbing his eyes and preparing to rise in order to say at last his own word and do his own deed. What this word and deed would be remained a mystery even for Turgenev's own intuition. Russia was for him a Sphinx, the solution of whose riddle lay in the future.

V

Turgenev the artist is above the subject he is dealing with. He never sacrifices the truth of life to the truth of art, nor the truth of art to that of life. He is rather poised between the two, often achieving their organic union. What is " European " in him, is his unusual sense of construction, which he blends with his dominant " Russian " qualities : naturalness, warmth, generosity, and that indefinable intimacy with which he impresses his characters upon the consciousness of the reader. His sense of balance is seen not only in his arrangement of the plot, but also in his tactful dis-

tribution of contrasts : Rudin and Natasha (in *Rudin*) ; Liza and Varvara Pavlovna on the one hand, and Lavretsky and the " brilliant " Panshin, on the other (in *A Nest of Gentlefolk*) ; or Marianna and Nezhdanov in *Virgin Soil*, etc. His characters are realistic portraits of the 'forties, 'fifties and 'sixties ; at the same time they are both Russian and universally human.

The variety of his portraits, particularly those of women, is also surprising. It is a mistake to say that Turgenev specialised in the " Tatyana " type. This type of crystallised womanhood in all its shades certainly remained his favourite—perhaps as a projection of that complement of himself which he always needed and never found ; but he depicted no less convincingly all sorts of other women as well : from exalted semi-hysterical young girls to repellent blue-stockings and prospective suffragettes ; stale old maids, cold worldly cocottes, amateur " vamps " (Pologova in *Spring Waters*), or such enchantingly sensuous natures as Irina in *Smoke*.

His women are stronger than his men, and in their very strength there is a kind of fatality. " Man is weak, woman is strong, and chance is all-powerful " is one of his sayings, which could serve as a slogan for most of his love stories. Yet his weaklings are more interesting and more complex than his strong men ; they also give him a better opportunity for displaying his feeling for psychological nuances. Turgenev's *forte* is in his love scenes, which are full of reserve, of hidden melancholy and of a tenderness which sometimes borders on sentimentality, but never passes into it. His discreet touch,

combined with a fastidious inwardness and with an intensely musical diction, often produces the atmosphere of a beautiful autumn afternoon whose poetry is even increased by the signs of decay. He is the most poetic Russian prose-writer; but his lyrical strength has often an enervating effect upon the reader, imparting to him Turgenev's own fatalism with regard to love and life.

All that has been said of his novels at their best can be applied to his shorter and longer stories as well. Here, if anywhere, Turgenev is without a flaw: a master of construction, of artistic economy, of the right word and shade. Some of his *Sportsman's Sketches*, then his *First Love*, *Asya*, *A King Lear of the Steppes*, *The Spring Waters*, *Poonin and Baboorin*, and others are among the glories of Russian and also of world literature. It was only towards the end of his life that his creative power began to subside even in his stories. His *Song of Triumphant Love* (1881) and *Clara Milich* (1882) dabble in dilettantish spiritism and occultism. Also his *Poems in Prose* (*Senilia*), exquisite as some of them may be, reflect the weariness and resignation of an old man facing death. He died in 1883.

VI

All things considered, Turgenev was, in contrast with so many other Russian authors, an essentially *æsthetic* nature. Art was for him both a vocation and a refuge from life's ugliness, suffering and sadness. He needed such a refuge all the more the more "superfluous" he

felt in those new processes of life which were fermenting around him. He kept to the old fundamental values —love, loyalty, honour and enthusiasm for beauty as they were understood by the best representatives of his own class, yet that psychic basis from which they could derive faith and vitality was already sapped in him. At the bottom of life he saw only a blind-alley and a void which could not be ousted either by his art or by his external allegiance to radical political groups. He did his best to understand the younger generation with their new "table of values." He was even ready to adapt himself to them ; yet by all his instincts, ways and habits he remained a cultured offspring of the old Russian gentry—infected by Western scepticism and suffering from the consciousness of its own futility.

Fathers and Children can give us even a certain clue to this aspect of Turgenev. Consciously he welcomes Bazarov. He is impressed by his strength, by his opinions, by his frank " beyond good and evil," even by his studied lack of manners. At the same time it is easy to feel that Turgenev the gentleman is puzzled and even repelled by him. Hence his double attitude with regard to Bazarov—that of conscious admiration and of subconscious dislike. The truth is that in spite of all his interest in various liberal currents of that period, Turgenev was to the end an uprooted Russian *barin*—a restless wanderer who could not feel at home either in Russia or in Europe. He felt only a " superfluous " member of the already superfluous and decaying caste whose types and traditions he described with all

the greater love the more he was aware of their prospective doom. On the one hand, he was a champion of emancipation, and on the other, his entire work became an elegiac swan-song of that very "gentry period" which was bound to disintegrate after the reforms of 1861. Turgenev the citizen stood for as many liberal improvements as possible; but the eyes of Turgenev the artist were still lingering on the dying past of his own class. Perhaps he was really at home only in that past which he described with secret regret even when criticising and blaming it.

Turgenev felt so homeless in the rapidly changing modern world that an atmosphere of doom seemed eventually to emanate out of his very personality. Mme. Herzen compared him once with an uninhabited room: "Its walls are damp, and their dampness gets into your bones; you are afraid to sit down, afraid to touch anything, and you only wish to get out of it as quickly as possible." Fortunately, this does not apply to his works. The period he deals with is now a matter of the historical past; but the art remains alive, although its finesse may seem a bit anæmic if compared with the vigour of such creators as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Despite the changing literary fashions, Turgenev can still face the test of severest revision without being in danger of forfeiting his acknowledged position—that of a world classic.

V

IBSEN AND SHAW

I

THERE have been two waves of dramatic revival in the second half of the nineteenth century: the first came mainly from Scandinavia, while the second—from about 1890 onwards—found its promoters in other European countries: Gerhardt Hauptmann in Germany, Anton Chekhov in Russia, Bernard Shaw in England. The towering pioneer and the chief innovator of the modern drama is, of course, Ibsen; its most prolific and most conspicuous representative is and remains Bernard Shaw. Many of those who have read Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism* (in which, by the way, he reveals his own essence rather than that of Ibsen), will be inclined to see in Ibsen's work at least two Shavian pieces before Shaw: one is *The Pillars of Society*, and the other *The Enemy of the People*. Several plays by Shaw give the impression of having descended from these two parents—with Nora of the last act as their god-mother and with *Ghosts* leering somewhere in the background. But apart from this, what a difference between Shaw and Ibsen—a difference in temperament, in outlook, in language, in technique and also in effect. The contrast is that between the two generations which

may still have certain things in common, yet which fundamentally differ even when they seem to fight for the same or for similar aims.

Ibsen is by his temperament one of the last great figures of romanticism. The whole of his early period, roughly from *Catilina* to *Emperor and Galilean*, is romantic and at the same time permeated with a violent puritanic strain which he could never throw off. This union of a romantic temperament which is a negation of external and inner discipline, with an innate Puritanism which always demands a rigid self-mastery and self-restraint, gives the key to the character of Ibsen and of Ibsen's works. His unique quality is precisely the blending of a militant romanticist with an extremely introspective, cold and analytical Puritan. The obvious result of such a blending was that ethical romanticism which Ibsen repeatedly tried to embody in his art. So much so that the ethical problem remained the core and kernel of his creation.

Even in his so-called realistic plays (such as *Pillars of Society, A Doll's House, Ghosts, The Enemy of the People*) Ibsen is in essence only a romanticist from the other end : he takes revenge upon reality by exposing, by chastising it for the very reason that it does not respond to his fervent romantic aspirations. *The Wild Duck*, undoubtedly one of his ablest plays, looks like an attempt to escape from his own ethical-romantic attitude towards life, but in vain—this attitude was in his blood. His subsequent " psychological " and " symbolic " plays (such as *Rosmersholm*, and *The Masterbuilder*) are chiefly projections of the

inner tragedy of a romantic dreamer who cannot accept reality at the expense of his higher ethical claims, and yet feels the futility of those claims in so far as they do not become living life. His *Lady from the Sea* strikes a note of reconciliation with reality, but this note is as artificial as the whole play, which suffers from too many and too "clever" mechanical contrivances. Ibsen's other psychological play, *Hedda Gabler*, is externally his most realistic achievement; yet Hedda is the very symbol of *negative* romanticism: finding reality boring and vulgar, she sees no worthy outlet for her suppressed aspirations and her latent force; therefore, she takes revenge upon life, upon others, and upon herself.

Ibsen's plays have a subjective undercurrent which is cleverly sublimated in such works as *Rosmersholm*, or *The Masterbuilder*. They can be read and acted as objective works of art; underneath, however, they illustrate the most intimate moments of Ibsen's own fight with himself: the fight between the old and the new Adam. *The Masterbuilder* marks Ibsen's final effort towards a reconciliation of his romantic hopes with reality, and at the same time his final heroic defeat. After this there remains nothing but the "epilogue" with that resignation which becomes ice-cold in *Little Eyolf*, and which flares up in a last futile rebellion in *John Gabriel Borkman*, and in *When We Dead Awaken*. The sculptor Rubek, who once had symbolised in a statue his vision of a glorious Resurrection of the whole of life, did not want to give up his illusion, yet he had to. "But I learned wisdom in the years that

followed, Irene. . . . The little round plinth on which your figure stood erect and solitary—it no longer afforded room for all the imagery I now wanted to add. . . . I imagined that which I saw with my eyes around me in the world. I had to include it—I could not help it, Irene, I expanded the plinth—made it wide and spacious. And on it I placed a segment of the curving, bursting earth. And up from the fissures of the soil there now swarm men and women with dimly suggested animal faces. Women and men as I knew them in real life . . . " Ibsen the romanticist and Ibsen the burrowing Puritan—they were both doomed to turn against life as it is and to land him in a sort of freezing scepticism, solitude and silence. " I see all life lying on its bier "—this is the confession of Ibsen's last play which is an appropriate finale to his own life and work.

There is no doubt that whatever Ibsen wrote, he wrote out of an *inner inevitability*. The chief stimulus of his work was his own spiritual fight and experience, which he tried to embody in his plays. Without this urge he probably could not have created at all, because he was the very antithesis of a professional *littérateur*. His artistic resources fell short at times, and the " idea " stuck out of the play without having been made flesh, as we see in *Emperor and Galilean*. But whenever he blends the two, his art obtains its dynamic power chiefly from its own inner inevitability. And so it can affect one profoundly on both the æsthetic and the spiritual planes.

II

It is enough to compare the aged Ibsen—that reserved stoic with bitterly compressed lips and a cold questioning glance—with the voluble, vivacious Bernard Shaw, in order to see all the difference between a romantic-aristocratic father and his realistic-democratic descendant. If Ibsen's tone and somewhat stiff dignity remind one of a fastidious recluse, the expansive Shaw seems to be made for propaganda, for versatile public speaking and for militant journalism. Ibsen is an unpractical dreamer who undermines his own dreams at the moment when he most wishes to believe in them ; Shaw, on the other hand, strikes one as an emancipated " nonconformist " on a large scale, and it is known that nonconformists (whether emancipated or not) are very practical, matter-of-fact people. Ibsen deals with humanity *sub specie aeterni*, while Shaw is concerned mainly with the current problems of the day. Ibsen seeks and questions in his very struggle ; Shaw only answers—and this with perfect self-assurance, because he knows beforehand all answers and solutions. If he were not sure of them he probably would not write his plays. Ibsen is tormented by the vision of an ethical superman who could overcome and redeem the Old Adam. It was in the name of this vision that he examined all the basic values of our existence from the angle of his highest ethical claims. There was the yeast of a prophet in Ibsen, but this yeast never fermented, and so the prophet often appeared inarticulate as it were : he said less than he wanted to, even less than he ought.

This disproportion between actual content and a too cautious expression is unknown to Bernard Shaw. He always says what he wants to say and sometimes even more. To Ibsen everything is complex; to Shaw everything is simple. Even the greatest problems of life—those of God, of Evil—he solves with imperturbable simplicity (or simplification). "To me God does not exist," he says in his letter to Tolstoy in 1910;[1] "but there is a creative force constantly struggling to evolve an executive organ of godlike knowledge and power: that is, to achieve omnipotence and omniscience; and every man and woman born is a fresh attempt to achieve this object. . . . If you believe, as I do, that the croup bacillus was an early attempt to create a higher being than anything achieved before that time, and that the only way to remedy the mistake was to create a still higher being, part of whose work must be the destruction of that bacillus, the existence of evil ceases to present any problem."

One can imagine the suppressed ironical smile with which Ibsen would listen to such a simple solution. Even when Ibsen and Shaw externally agree on various subjects (and they often do), there still remains an inner difference between them—a difference in depth and in direction. Shaw, being an active "extravert," is directed towards external life problems; the brooding "introvert" Ibsen, on the other hand, concentrates first of all upon that eternal *Problem of Life* which can perhaps be solved only upon a supra-logical or religious plane. The whole inner tragedy of Ibsen was due to the

[1] Quoted from the *Evening Standard*, February 6th, 1928.

fact that, endowed with a profound moral instinct, he had no religious instinct. Devoid of religious consciousness, he was bound to have recourse to purely intellectual solutions, to various philosophic and sociological creeds, which led him to scepticism and proved eventually mere illusions, mere "ghosts"; for however plausible they be on the plane of logic and reasoning, they were helpless on that plane which is beyond reasoning; consequently they could not save him from his impasse.

Ibsen *needed* religion as the ultimate justification of his own moral sense, which was strong enough to keep him spell-bound to the end by the uncompromising "all-or-nothing," and to weigh him down by his continuous feeling of guilt—the feeling of *individual* responsibility for the evils of all life. He also knew that morality which is not rooted in an adequate supra-moral, that is, religious consciousness, must become problematic. And since he was entirely deprived of such consciousness, his own moral sense, which was his chief inner urge, became problematic to him. He remained suspended in the air between his void and the "Categorical Imperative." Anxious to reconcile life with the "meaning of life," he could find no other connecting link than his own moral will which grew more uncertain the deeper he tried to probe into morality as such. *Brand* marks the first stage of that inner drama which forced Ibsen to embark on his quest for the highest regeneration of life and made eventually that very quest hopeless and futile. It begins with Brand's "all-or-nothing" and ends with Rubek's com-

plaint : " In front, beside a fountain sits a man weighed down with guilt, who cannot free himself from the earth-crust. I call him remorse for a forfeited life. He sits there and slips his fingers in the purling stream—to wash them clean—and he is gnawed and tortured by the thought that never, never will he succeed. Never in all eternity will he attain to freedom and the new life. He will remain for ever prisoned in his hell. . . . "

What a contrast between this despair and the invariable optimism of Bernard Shaw. If the gloomy Ibsen is always displeased with himself, Shaw seems to be pleased with nothing and no one but himself. Believing that his own views and ideas are right for Shaw, he is sure that they are right for the rest of humanity. His plays and prefaces are brimming with such ideas ; yet they are more paradoxical than profound, paradoxical in a rationalistic sense. Ibsen's rationalism is only one part of Ibsen, and he is often at issue with it. He knows that the truly dramatic begins with the irrational, that is, with what is mysterious and inexplicable in life, and he takes full advantage of it even when trying to explain it. His men and women can be *dramatically* mysterious, while Shaw's characters are only perplexing. Instead of the irrational mystery of life we feel behind Shaw's art a simplified " philosophy " of life which he is anxious to prove, to defend and to impose. Ibsen's art, like all great art, is elusive without being sophisticated, the art of Shaw is cleverly sophisticated without being elusive. In Ibsen one feels that whatever he writes about is the result not of reasoning only, but of pro-

found spiritual experience (*geistiges Erlebnis*). Even when he fights with his age and its " ghosts " he does so chiefly in order to work out, through that very fight, his own spiritual individuality. Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, seems to fight in order to assert himself while opposing his own truths and valuations against the current ones. In such a fight intellectual self-assurance is essential, and it becomes most effectual when it takes the form of comedy and laughter. Moreover, a satirical comedian of Shaw's stamp need not seek, or at least he must not show that he seeks ; because he can ridicule convincingly only as long as he is sure of that truth and of that standpoint in the name of which he ridicules all other truths and standpoints as false. A seeker again, particularly such a stern and self-tormented seeker as Ibsen, is usually on the high road towards tragedy.

III

Tragedy is by its nature directed towards a plane which is higher than the average life, because its very essence lies in the discrepancy between the ideal and the real. Tragedy deals not with manners, but with human destinies. It is based upon the inevitability of Fate. Its hero must show a continuous and ever-increasing inner tension which breaks only at the moment of his catastrophe. Yet by forfeiting his personal life, he saves the dignity of life as a whole. As his defiant will does not bend in resignation, his courage in the teeth of Fate fills us with all the greater admiration the more suffering he has to endure. He makes us forget the

squalid *misery* of existence by showing us the possibility of *tragedy* in all its sombre beauty. And by doing this on a purely æsthetic plane, he sublimates both our pity and our fear of life : they give way to a liberating thrill which raises us not only above all " terror and pity," but also above all pessimism and optimism.

It is regrettable that the sense of tragedy has been lost in modern Europe, in spite of Nietzsche's endeavour to revive it. This was perhaps inevitable, for in a world in which all the basic values of life have become relative, the sense of the tragic is bound to disappear. A tragic attitude is possible only where certain things are taken with utter seriousness ; but modern man, ravaged by doubt and scepticism, has neither enough faith nor freshness to be able to do this. One of the notable attempts to embody the tragic sense was Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Yet with all its vigour, Zarathustra is not a spontaneous myth or symbol, arising from the elemental forces of life, but a substitute for such a myth—a gorgeously stylised didactic allegory.

As for Ibsen, he certainly was lingering on the verge of real tragedy. He came nearest to it in Brand, and afterwards to a lesser extent in Rebecca, in Solness and in Borkman. But on the whole he mixed the tragic with the pseudo-tragic—with what can be called merely unhappy, pathetic, or even miserable. (Rosmer, for instance, is pathetic and not tragic. So is Alfred Almers in *Little Eyolf*.) Ibsen's attempt at a modern tragedy proper borders on a brilliant failure, and he failed perhaps for a reason analogous to that

which, according to Nietzsche, caused the decay of Greek tragedy: the prevalence of the "Socratic spirit," that is, of the purely reasoning and moralising impulse, which was at least as strong in Ibsen as it had been in his ancient counterpart, Euripides. Instead of creating the modern tragedy, he only recreated that hybrid genre which is more accessible to our tastes and theatres—the modern "drama" as such.

If tragedy deals with what is fundamental and inevitable in life, comedy is confined to the surface of life with all its casual and capricious absurdities. Yet in order to get hold of us, it must be "superficial from profundity." Comedy in its deepest sense is a reversed tragedy: only when the tragic of life has been detached and sublimated to such an extent that the author can play with it with pure intellectual enjoyment, comedy (as distinct from "undetached" satire) becomes possible. A farce is only superficial; its very essence is that it purposely ignores everything deep and tragic. Comedy on the other hand must not ignore the tragic attitude—it must veil it instead and make it divinely light. However profound its conception, its surface must always show a dancing ease and that bracing vivacity which knows how to utter deep and daring things with an air of brilliant casualness. Comedy may concentrate on characters, on situations, or on both together. Yet its characters are not necessarily in the process of development. They show instead actions and reactions of their typical qualities which are already there. And these will produce all the stronger effect the more general features of entire groups and

classes they embody. Comedy can thus operate as much by means of "human-all-too-human" *types*, as by individual characters.

Tragedy is concerned with a plane of life which is above the average; comedy, on the other hand, deals with that plane which is on or below the average. Yet the comic author is not allowed to identify himself with it. He must contemplate it from a higher angle and at the same time know how to mask his own standpoint. The hidden divergence between the two often creates the comic pathos of the play. This pathos is, however, weakened and spoilt when the author takes off his mask and steps in personally, pronouncing through his mouthpiece some lesson or other. The comedy then becomes mixed with the sermon, with moral lectures, with journalism and "publicistics."

It is naïve to say that moral ideas must be kept away from art. Every idea, even the most moral one, is justified as an element of a work of art as long as it is expressed in terms of art and not in terms of a lecture. All good art is moral by its very essence, and for that reason is never moralising. Moralising begins when art is used for purposes which are extraneous to it—as a peg for various rules and precepts. Nor is art here to be used as an illustration of "ideas." Instead of illustrating, it must *embody* them, make them live with a new æsthetic reality of its own which is as independent as it is vital. Creation begins only with that process which transmutes the raw material of actual life into independent and yet powerful æsthetic realities.

IV

It is interesting to compare in this respect the creative methods of Shaw and Ibsen. For apart from the difference which exists between a comedy and a "serious" drama, there are certain similarities in the inner constitution of Ibsen and of Shaw. Both of them are nonconformist in character, which means that they are stimulated by protest and by fight against the tide; both are reformers, both are intellectual, and both write "plays of ideas"; that is, they start with some *problem* or other, which could be said in plain philosophic terms, and which they prefer to solve by means of their art.

As is known, the new technical devices of the so-called "Ibsenian drama" (roughly from *Pillars of Society* onwards) have but one aim: to find the most economic way of embodying various social or ethical problems in living characters. Ibsen struggles with his "thesis" until he transmutes it into flesh. How stubborn and difficult this fight must have been is proved by all his plays after *Brand*. In order to overcome this difficulty, he altered the technique of modern drama first of all by introducing into it the retrospective exposition instead of the accepted development of the entire plot on the stage. Each of his plays is only a psychological "epilogue," an inner reaction to a tragic guilt contracted by the hero in the past, before the play began.

It is only at his best that Ibsen managed to embody his problems and ideas in such a way as to make them

an inevitable outcome of the inner lives of his characters. Moreover, while Ibsen the Puritan often tried to *force* his " problems " in some direction or other, Ibsen the psychologist (and the artist) was usually discreet enough to let the characters, once they were conceived, develop according to their own inner laws. This was all the more to his credit because the preacher and reformer was at least as strong in him as in Shaw. But in spite of his stubborn fight with his material —a fight which was perhaps responsible for the slow output of his plays—Ibsen often fell short of success even later on. His art was not sufficiently strong to blend " idea " and " psychology " in such plays for example as *The Lady from the Sea*, or *When We Dead Awaken*. The clumsy and purely allegoric (*i.e.*, mechanical) symbolism in these two works, far from concealing, only emphasises Ibsen's failure.

The prolific output of Bernard Shaw forms a great contrast to the cautious creative process of Ibsen. Ibsen sifts his " ideas " through his spirit ; Shaw sifts his, above all, through his temperamental reasoning Furthermore, instead of incarnating them in living characters, Shaw often prefers the quicker way : to stick them upon ready-made types. Ibsen may force his characters into moulds suggested by " ideas," yet he derives the dialogue from the characters without imposing it upon them. Shaw, on the other hand, seems to make the dialogue first, and then to impose it upon figures, frequently without worrying about psychological or even logical consistencies as long as the dialogue itself is really vivid, witty and amusing. Even

in such an ambitious play as *Candida*, Shaw's psychology has a false ring, as if it were reasoned out, prepared in his intellectual laboratory rather than extracted from living life. However enjoyable his comedies may be, they often leave one with the impression that a paradox, a stinging joke, or a satirical sally matter to Shaw more than a well-rounded character. He is more striking than strong. Or better, he is strong on the plane of journalism rather than on the plane of art. This is why some of his comedies almost seem to be clever appendices to his equally clever prefaces.

Shaw is a past master of comic situations. Yet again many of his situations have the convincingness of a paradox rather than of life. His usual starting point is the negation of accepted opinions and traditions, especially those of the respectable "middle classes." Commercial exploitation, marriage, the family, war, politics, doctors, education, reverence for one's elders, etc. etc., all these are discussed, refuted, and reversed by Shaw. The discussion and the " public lecture " thus become an essential part of his dialogue. Many of his plays are brilliantly dramatised controversies, the usual outcome of which is that Shaw's unconventional mouthpiece is right and the rest of the world is wrong. Unconventionality thus becomes a dogmatic convention with Shaw. So much so that sometimes he strikes one as being a Victorian from the other side. And as to his figures, they can be often reduced to a few types the principal of which is the sarcastic bully whose *métier* it is not so much to convince as to shock.

He is always sharp and witty, but the more we laugh at his peppered witticisms the more we feel that he is a clever *diabolus ex machina* whom Shaw himself pulls by the strings.

Ibsen visualises his figures in terms of human destiny and of the Problem of Life; Shaw visualises his from the angle of topical problems, many of which are already dated together with the plays. It is enough to compare Ibsen's great tragi-comēdy *Peer Gynt* with Shaw's works in order to see the difference. In Ibsen at his best it is the symbolised truth of Life that stirs us; in Shaw it is usually Shaw himself who wants to impose upon us his own views and opinions. And so, even when agreeing with him, we involuntarily defend ourselves against his well-meant tyranny. At the same time there is so much of a devilish *enfant terrible* even in Shaw the reformer that one cannot separate one from the other.

Ibsen has more passion than temperament. In Shaw temperament is stronger than passion. We feel the same about their figures. If Ibsen's heroes are always more alive than lively, those of Shaw are usually more lively than alive. For this very reason they are also excellent "parts" devised with a consummate knowledge of the stage. One remembers Ibsen's Brand, Ekdal, Rosmer, Rebecca, Hedda, as characters who live, or could live, independently of Ibsen. They possess a vitality of their own. Shaw's figures, on the other hand, are too often galvanised by the tremendous intellectual vitality of Shaw himself. We remember their sayings rather than their faces. Their witticisms and lectures

can change our prejudices and opinions; but Ibsen's heroes change and purify our spirit. Whatever the faults of Ibsen's plays may be, their *psychic* effect is unique; one breathes in them that cold and pure mountain air which is, alas, vanishing from the marshes of modern civilisation.

V

Ibsen is becoming more and more "only a classic," that is, a writer who is admired rather than read, which is a pity. Yet the fact remains that with his work he saved, at least for a time, the European drama from the decay into which it had been plunged by the empty "society plays" manufactured by Scribe, Sardou and Co. He also saved it from the clumsy attempts to transform the drama into a photographic "copy" of life.

With the exception of the Russian playwright, Ostrovsky, the early exercises in realistic drama were hardly encouraging. Without discussing the question as to whether the "representational" (i.e., realistic) or the "presentational" (i.e., purely theatrical) method is the right thing for the stage, we can safely affirm that in Ibsen's hands the drama became one of the most powerful interpreters of modern life—from the angle of its higher values and valuations. He made the "realistic" problem play alive by giving it a new form and conception, even by deepening it to a symbolic significance.

Shaw is a child of a different generation—more

nervous, versatile, quick, and for this very reason more striking and brilliant. While the aim of his plays is to be "realistic," his way of working them out often verges on the conventional theatrical methods, reminding one of Molière, or even of the *Comedia dell'Arte*. This blending, added to the already mentioned mixture of art and journalism, and to a strong sense of satire (as distinct from the sense of humour which is not so strong in Shaw) is responsible for that Shavian burlesque which can be irresistible even when its fun is more deliberate than spontaneous.

Bernard Shaw's craft is of the highest order even when his art is not. His Mephistophelian coldness and hardness may be a stumbling block to some of his readers; but this is perhaps only one of his masks—the mask of a man who dislikes his own gentleness and wants to conceal it under its antithesis. In this great egotist there is not a tinge of narrow egoism; and he probably slanders himself when writing (1912) in a letter to Mrs. Patrick Campbell: "Stella, Stella—Shut your ears tight against this blarneying Irish liar and actor. Read no more of his letters. He will fill his fountain-pen with your heart's blood and sell your most sacred emotions on the stage. He is a mass of imagination and no heart. He is a writing and talking machine that has worked for nearly forty years until its skill is devilish."

Shaw's works with all their qualities and defects, may have lost their former appeal with the young generation. This can be particularly said of those "topical"

comedies and satires of his which are too much bound up with the period in which they were written. It is difficult to say what the verdict of the future will be, yet one thing is sure: he will always appeal to certain purely intellectual and whimsical temperaments. Important for the history of drama and of manners, he will pass on to posterity as one of the great spring cleaners of the modern mind.

VI

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

I

THERE are two dominant figures in French poetry between the period of romanticism proper and that of symbolism: Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire. Hugo remained to the end a romanticist and a poetic virtuoso whose prolific imagination was on the whole devoid of an adequate depth of emotion. He had his great moments (and many of them); yet as he painted with too broad a brush, he was inclined to be more exuberant than subtle. Considering his poetic vocation in the light of a great leader, he was attracted by the platform; and once on the platform, he often fell a victim to his own heavy virtuosity, melodramatic contrasts, solemn poses, and an "oleographic" pathos. As he was fond of speaking to listeners, he was particularly in his element when dealing with moods and thoughts accessible to all, or issuing grandiloquent commonplaces about love, justice, pity, and the like. He was a poetic demagogue and the greatest bard for the "general reader."

But while the celebrated and rich Victor Hugo wrote for the many, his hapless contemporary,

Charles Baudelaire, was perhaps the first great modern poet who sang for the few, at times only for himself. The majority of his poems are "difficult" soliloquies in verse. Hugo continued the romantic tradition during the Parnassian period and even to the dawn of symbolism, without introducing any new note into the post-romantic literature. An original note was introduced, however, by Baudelaire. He brought into it new themes and emotions, a new tone, a new accent and language. Although his essential work consists of one single book, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), its place in modern poetry is somewhat analogous to the place of Dostoevsky's novels in modern fiction. Both Baudelaire and Dostoevsky deal with the dark regions of the "subconscious"; with that Inferno where all contradictions exist side by side, where good and evil are intermixed in a disturbing way and often seem to condition each other.

It was out of those depths that Baudelaire's tragic "flowers of evil" had grown. The introspective Baudelaire was as vertical and intensive as Hugo was extensive and horizontal. Hugo was all temperament and imagination; Baudelaire was all self-observation and sensibility—the "new sensibility." Hugo was health itself, while Baudelaire was a walking bundle of nerves and diseases which he exploited in a creative way. The theatrical poses, as well as the naïve optimism of Victor Hugo, must have seemed rather crude to his subtler brother poet. For although Hugo paid an original compliment to Baudelaire's poems when he deigned to notice in them *un nouveau frisson* (a new

shudder), Baudelaire himself had no high opinion either of Victor Hugo or of his works. In a letter to his mother he described *Les Misérables* as a book which "is beneath contempt and stupid." In another letter (November 3rd, 1865), he wrote: "Victor Hugo, who stayed for some time in Brussels, bored me and tired me very much. I would accept neither his fame nor his fortune, if with them I had his frightful absurdities. Madame Hugo is half an idiot, and her two sons are great fools. If you would like to read his last book (*Chansons des rues et des bois*), I will send it to you at once. As usual, enormous success, *as to sales*, but a disappointment to all intelligent people who read it. It is horribly heavy. I only see in such things, as in so many others, another occasion for thanking God for not making me equally stupid. I repeat ceaselessly the Pharisee's prayer."[1]

This dislike was perhaps natural. Baudelaire belonged not only to a different school (being twenty years younger than Hugo), but also to a different type of mentality; so different in fact that he became responsible, together with Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, for some of the most notable discoveries and transvaluations in modern letters.

II

Baudelaire was a child of Paris. His mother was thirty-four years younger than his father—a difference

[1] From the *Letters of Baudelaire*, translated by Arthur Symons (John Rodker).

for which the future poet had to pay in nerves, in his general psychic and physical constitution. When the boy was six years old, Mme. Baudelaire was already a widow. She soon married the utterly respectable M. Aupick, who became later an ambassador and a general. This step of hers affected the young boy in quite an unexpected way—it aroused his jealousy. The truth is that he was almost erotically attached to his mother. He loved her for her elegance, her womanly charm and beauty. As late as 1861 he confessed to her (in a letter) : " There was in my youth a period of passionate love for you, listen and read, without fear. . . . All that time I was living in you and you were uniquely mine. You were at once my idol and my friend. Perhaps you will be astonished to see me speak with such passion of a time so distant. It astonishes me, too."

Perhaps Baudelaire's later spirit of revolt had really something to do with his natural dislike of his step-father. Respectability, orderliness, social ambitions —all such things could easily appear despicable to him for the very reason that they were among the chief attributes of the hated M. Aupick. Anyhow, he started quite early an independent bohemian life, interrupted only by a long voyage, after which he threw himself into all the hectic experiences and extravagances which Paris could offer him. In 1848 he even became an active revolutionary, but he insisted on one thing : " Il faut aller fusiller le général Aupick." (We must go and shoot General Aupick.) In a short time he managed to squander more than one half of the money bequeathed to him by his father. At the

instigation of M. Aupick he was put under a sort of state tutelage (*conseil judiciaire*), and since his income thus became much too small to cover even his ordinary needs, he fell a prey to usurers who exploited and pursued him for the rest of his life. Most of the letters he wrote from now onwards to his mother were about money. His position became complicated owing to his strange infatuation for the degraded half-caste harlot, Jeanne Duval, whom he had to support. His need became so great that he was now and then on the verge of starvation. "I have had sometimes to stay in bed for three days, either for want of clean linen, or for want of food," he wrote to his mother in 1847. "Frankly, laudanum and wine are the worst remedies against grief. They pass time, but do not repair life. And even to stupefy oneself money is needed. The last time you were kind enough to oblige me with fifteen francs, I had not eaten for *two days*—forty-eight hours."

Such a state of things could hardly have a good influence on his nerves. To this must be added the Parisian life with its mixture of pleasures, vices and temptations to which such a will-less youth as Baudelaire was bound to succumb. He succumbed in particular to the temptations of flesh, in which he indulged without restraint. The curious point, however, is that Baudelaire's sensuality had, from the very outset, a morbid *spiritual flavour*. So much so that the aberrations of his senses can perhaps be best understood if treated in close connection with the aberrations of his spirit; for Baudelaire is—in his own distorted way—one of the most spiritual temperaments in modern poetry.

As we read in his posthumous journal, *My Heart Laid Bare* (*Mon cœur mis à nu*), he had already in his childhood strong tendencies towards mysticism. He even mentions his "conversations with God." The sense of mystery, of a transcendental reality behind our visible world, remained in him strong to the end of his life. But owing to his highly-developed *æsthetic* taste on the one hand, and to his lack of active will-power on the other, this sense took in him a negative direction. He experienced the general ugliness of life as a moral evil; and since he saw nothing but ugliness and squalor in the whole of our existence, he identified life with evil. The consciousness of "original sin," or of the fundamental evil which is at the basis of all reality, never left Baudelaire. He stated it again and again in his poetry; sometimes he exerted his mind even in metaphysical speculations. "What is the fall?" he asks in his *Mon cœur mis à nu*. "If that be unity which has become duality, then God Himself has fallen. Is then not the entire creation the fall of God?"

Feeling in the misery of our world an outrage inflicted upon the whole of life by its Creator, he raised an inner protest and rebellion against God and against the order of His Universe. He often indulged in blasphemies and in degrading acts not for their own sake, but because they gave him an illusion of daring defiance of God. Like Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, he was inclined to "return the entrance ticket" into heaven and to remain with the doomed, with the progeny of Cain. He even revelled in the consciousness of being doomed: he looked upon it as a kind of privilege and did his best to

deserve the privilege by sins and blasphemies. He may be immoral in his rebellion, yet his immorality *is in essence prompted by a moral impulse*—the impulse of his offended sense of cosmic justice and beauty. In his sins he found not a physical, but a perverted spiritual pleasure—the pleasure of a Satanic "God-struggler" who deliberately chooses damnation and unhappiness as a part of his greatness and his protest. This is why Baudelaire says that he cannot conceive beauty as separated from unhappiness. "The most perfect type of virile beauty is Satan—after Milton's pattern." In his poem *Abel and Cain* he therefore takes sides with Cain's progeny, and in *Les Litanies de Satan* he sings :

> "Gloire et louange à toi, Satan, dans les hauteurs
> Du ciel, où tu regnas, et dans les profondeurs
> De l'Enfer où, vaincu, tu rêves en silence !
> Fais que mon âme un jour, sous l'Arbre de Science,
> Près de toi se repose, à l'heure où sur ton front
> Comme un Temple nouveaux ses rameaux s'épandront ! "

III

An attitude such as this is not a matter of any formulated creed, but of a general *spiritual* disposition which can go hand-in-hand even with scepticism on the plane of intellect. One can be a sceptic intellectually and at the same time a religious mystic (whether positive or negative) by temperament. Baudelaire himself endorsed this possibility when confessing on one occasion : "Je suis mystique au fond et je ne crois à rien." (I am a mystic at bottom and yet believe in nothing).

Baudelaire's Satanic revolt against the order of the

world was then a matter of his distorted religious temperament. It was religiosity from the other end. The entire meaning and intensity of his protest, and perhaps also his creative force, would be lost if he were not religious. True, the critic Brunetière called him once "only a boarding-house Satan," but in doing so he overlooked the deeper aspects of Baudelaire's sins and utterances. Baudelaire was a child of decaying Catholicism, and in some respects he remained an inverted Catholic ascetic even in his wildest sensual aberrations, since it was *not the pleasure but the horror of sin* that attracted him most. At the same time, when in the lowest depths of sin he often came close to its opposite extreme: that of greatest repentance and even saintliness. His verses abound in proofs of this. Take his *Examen de minuit*, together with a score of other poems. And in *Mon cœur mis à nu* we even find a prayer to God: "Donnez-moi la force de faire immédiatement mon devoir tous les jours et de devenir un héros et un saint" (Give me the strength always to do my duty and to become a hero and a saint).

Another feature connected with his satanic rebellion is his "taste for the horrible" (*le goût de l'horrible*). Enjoying the intensity of his own pain, he was always ready to increase it not only through deliberate sin and horror, but also through a shameless contemplation of the hidden psychic "underworld" which he tried to X-ray and to show in all its nakedness. He suffered —like his kindred spirit, Edgar Allan Poe, whom he discovered in 1846 and revealed to the Continent in masterly French translations—from a ceaseless inner

inquisitiveness which urged him on and on to new experiences, to unknown realms of the negative kind, even when he had to pay for this by his own suffering. "In certain spirits, inquisitive and *blasé*," he affirms in one of his essays, "the enjoyment of ugliness comes from a mysterious feeling which is the thirst for the unknown, the taste for the horrible. A more or less developed germ of this instinct is to be found in everyone; it drives certain poets to arenas and to *cliniques*, and women to public executions."

Owing to his *spiritual* disgust with the actual world, he felt an alien in it. So he found all the greater pleasure in exposing its hidden and hideous secrets. He was an exile on earth, and he knew all the despair of an exile, of a prisoner for life. His usual mood was a kind of metaphysical tedium, or simply the romantic *Weltschmerz*, yet gloomier and more complicated. It came from the romantic contrast between the infinite squalor of actual life and his own yearning for infinite beauty. And since the only intensity of which he was capable was the intensity of his tedium, he deliberately cultivated it. For this reason he welcomed sin and squalor precisely because he hated them: they increased both his ennui and his impotent longing for the ideal—the two main *leitmotifs* of his poems. The very preface to his *Fleurs du Mal* finishes with these lines:

"Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,
Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,
Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants
Dans la ménagerie infame de nos vices

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde !
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grand gestes, ni grands cris,
Il ferait volontier de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde.

C'est l'ENNUI—L'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
—Hypocrite lecteur—mon semblable—mon frère ! "

He consciously worked himself into moods such as these in order to enjoy the intensity of his own "spleen." But in the depths of his tedium he found the way to his most exalted yearnings with which he inebriated himself like a drunkard who wants to forget his own misery in the fumes of drugs. "Be always drunken," he shouts in his *Little Poems in Prose*. "Nothing else matters; that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to earth, be drunken continually. Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will, but be drunken." And when drunkenness itself helps no longer, there is still death which we embrace with all the greater joy the more we suffer from the tedium of life as a whole.

" O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps, levons l'ancre !
Ce pays nous ennui, ô Mort ! Appareillons !
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons !
Verse nous ton poison qu'il nous réconforte !
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe ?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*."

Weariness, boredom, "rebellion," a morbid fear of reality, and an equally morbid thirst for the unknown,

only helped to foster Baudelaire's "decadent" romanticism which always went hand-in-hand with a coldly scrutinising self-analysis. He may have surrendered to sins, to weird ecstasies, to "artificial paradises," to drugs and dreams; yet in whatever depths he tried to forget himself, he remained self-conscious enough to watch the processes that were going on within his own ego. The very fact that he was so full of deliberate mystifications proves that he knew the truth about himself. Besides, Baudelaire's mystifications were connected also with another secret of his —the nature of his eroticism.

IV

What strikes a reader of Baudelaire's poetry is his frequent wavering between the chaste Madonna worship and the cult of the voluptuous "black Venus." In many a verse of his we hear the accent of a Catholic ascetic, and together with this, the strains of reckless sensuality. By a curious psychic paradox Baudelaire's very sensuality is a proof that he was not really sensuous by nature. He revelled not in the delight of the senses, but *in the pleasure of the fall*—a pleasure which was all the greater the stronger was his Christian consciousness of sin and of "rebellion." As he puts it in his *Mon cœur mis à nu*, "The unique and supreme enjoyment of love consists in the certitude that one is doing evil. Both man and woman know it, from their cradle, that in the evil lies all the enjoyment. . . ."

As a perverted voluptuary of the spirit and

not of the flesh, Baudelaire was thus utterly devoid of that shallow "pagan" epicureanism with which once Heine used to swagger, and after him various æsthetes *à la* Oscar Wilde. The roots of Baudelaire's erotics were both deeper and darker. But alongside his dark sensuality one can often feel in him a suppressed ideal of chaste love, as well as a secret need of warmth and affection, a need which had never been gratified—not even by his mother. Is it not strange that for about five years he wrote almost sentimental *anonymous* love-letters to Mme. Sabatier, who was, in spite of her ambiguous social position (she was a "kept" woman), a generous and warm-hearted mother type?

To all this another aspect of Baudelaire's erotics must be added: the fact that Baudelaire, the offspring of a sexagenarian, was physically one of the least passionate of men. To put it in medical terms, he was in essence undersexed; and this probably offended his pride and drove him to degraded women only, such as Jeanne Duval—his notorious "black Venus" from the gutter. Ashamed of his physical weakness, he wished to conceal it by boasting of his monstrous "successes" and by assuming the pose of a demoniacal Don Juan. It was here that his mystifications came in. On the other hand, his sexual imagination was as hot as his blood was cold. Lacking all spontaneous and *innocent* instinctive passion, he indulged in imaginary passions, as if wanting to stir up his cold and stagnant blood. This led, of course, to that *deliberate* debauch of the senses which begins always where real and healthy

passion ceases. Yet even Baudelaire's mystifications and poses have a tragic kernel which is hidden from a superficial reader. The danger arises when certain external aspects of his poetry are mistaken for its essence and turned into a literary fashion, as has been done by many camp-followers of modernism. Baudelaire wrote his pages with blood, while most of his affected imitators wrote theirs with red ink on perfumed paper. It is enough to mention one of such misunderstandings: Baudelaire's cult of the artificial as against the natural.

V

This cult, which was later taken up by several æsthetes of the *fin du siècle*, had been in Baudelaire a logical result of his negative attitude towards all visible reality. Rejecting the world both for spiritual and "decadent" reasons, he was looking for a refuge from it and its "nature" in unnatural experiences, and even in the so-called *paradis artificiels* conjured up by opium and by haschisch whose effects he described (under de Quincey's influence) in his well-known treatise. In addition, he was a child of a great city with its artificial civilisation and its peculiar mentality, which has little in common with that of the countryside. Already as a youth Baudelaire became a dandy who deliberately "stylised" not only his dress, but also his manners and his art. His dandyism served him as a need, as a mask, as a distinction and also as a bluff. Numerous illustrations can be found in *Fleurs du mal* (particularly in the first hundred and seven poems under

the general title " Spleen et Idéal ") and also in some of his *Little Poems in Prose*, above all in the one under the title, " Double Room,"[1] which deserves to be quoted as a perfect example of " stylised " decadent mentality.

" A room which is like a reverie, a room veritably *spiritual*, where the stagnant atmosphere is lightly tinged with red and with blue. There the soul takes a bath of idleness, perfumed by regret and desire. There is something in it of the twilight, reddish and bluish ; a dream of sensuality during an eclipse. The pieces of furniture have prostrated, lengthened, languid forms; they seem to dream ; one might say they are gifted with a somnambulistic life, like the vegetables and the minerals. The stuffs have a silent speech, like the flowers, the skies, like the setting suns. On the walls no artistic abominations. Relatively to the pure dream, to the unanalysed impression, definite art, positive art, is a blasphemy. Here, all has the sufficient clearness and the delicious obscurity of some harmony. An infinitesimal scent of the most exquisite choice, with which is mingled a slight humidity, swims in the atmosphere, where the slumbering spirit is lulled by the sensations of a hot-house. Muslin is hung over the windows and before the bed ; it scatters itself in snowy cascades. On this bed the idol sleeps, the sovereign of dreams. Whence came she hither ? Who brought her hither ? What magic power has installed her on this throne of reverie and of sensuality ? What matters it ? I see her, I recognise her. I see her eyes whose flame

[1] Translated by Arthur Symons in " Baudelaire's Poems " (Casanova Society).

traverses the twilight ; those subtle and terrible Venus' looking-glasses, that I recognise from their fearful malice ! They attract, they subjugate, they devour the regard of the hapless ones who gaze upon them. I have often studied them, these black stars which excite one's curiosity and one's admiration.

" To what benevolent demon do I owe the delight of being thus surrounded with mystery, with silence, with peace and with perfumes ? O beatitude ! That which we commonly call life in some crisis, has nothing in common with this supreme life which adds to my knowledge and which I savour minute by minute, second by second ! Lo ! There are no more minutes, there are no more seconds. Time has disappeared ; it is eternity which reigns, an Eternity of delights !

" But a terrible hard knock resounds on the door, and as in infernal dreams, it seems that a pickaxe has struck me in the stomach. A Spectre enters. It is a tipstaff who comes to torture me in the name of the law ; an infamous concubine, who comes to cry misery and to add the trivialities of her life to the sorrows of mine ; or it might be the errand-boy of a newspaper who asks for the rest of the manuscript.

" The paradisal room, the Idol, the sovereign of dreams, all this magic disappears at the spectre's brutal knock. Horror ! I remember, I remember ! Yes ; this attic, this abode of eternal Ennui, certainly is mine. Here are the stupid, dusty, ugly pieces of furniture ; the chimney without flame and without embers, soiled with spittings ; the sad windows on which the rain has traced furrows in the dust ; the revised or unfinished

manuscripts; the diary, where the pencil has marked sinister dates! And this perfume of another world, which intoxicates me, alas! is replaced by a foul odour of tobacco mixed with I know not what loathsome damp. One breathes here only the rancidity of desolation. In this narrow world, so full of disgust, only one known object smiles to me: the phial of laudanum, an old and terrible friend; but, like one's women friends, alas! pregnant in caresses and in treacheries.

"Yes! yes! Time has reappeared, who now reigns as sovereign, and with this hideous old man returns his demoniacal retinue of Memories, Regrets, Spasms, Fears, Anguishes, Nightmares, Wraths and Nerves. I assure you that the seconds are strongly and solemnly accentuated, and that each one, issuing from the clock, says 'I am Life, the insupportable, the implacable Life!'

"There is only one second in one's life whose mission is to announce some good piece of news, which brings with it an inexplicable fear. Yes! Time reigns; he has reassumed his brutal dictature. And he drives me, as if I were a bull, with his double goad—'And gee up, then, Moke! Sweat, then, Slave! Live, then, damned Soul!'"

VI

It would be difficult to show a better example in which romanticism and decadence blend into one. The whole of Baudelaire was such a blending—complicated by all the nuances and dissonances of a self-tormenting

modern soul. And the things he had seen and experienced while wandering in his own psychic underworld are recorded in his poems with such a unique accent, with so many new symbols and similes, that his *Fleurs du Mal* has become one of the corner-stones of modern poetry. Yet Baudelaire's poetry was revolutionary, first of all, in its themes. He enlarged its domain by adding to it that dark and "unpoetic" inner region which previous poets had either ignored or avoided. He symbolised in his poems the psychic hell of a modern man who is being crushed by the weight of reality and of his own contradictions.

On the one hand, he still keeps to traditional versification, which he brings to the highest pitch of deliberate "parnassian" discipline; and on the other, he imbues those traditional forms with a new *frisson*, with a new might and magic. However will-less and inefficient he may have been in life, in poetry (and also in prose) he was an extremely disciplined craftsman. Some of his poems give the impression of strange icy gargoyles, crystallised out of his hottest fancies and visions. He also liberated poetry from ordinary logical abstractions, replacing them by intuitive physical images to which one must first get used in order to appreciate them, as we see from the following example (taken from his "Spleen").

"Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,
Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,
S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide
Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées
D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,
Et qu'un peuple muet d'infames arraignées
Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie
Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,
Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie
Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement.

Et de long corbillards, sans tambours ni musique
Défilent lentement dans mon âme : l'Espoir,
Vaincu, pleure, et l'angoisse atroce, despotique,
Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir."

The way in which he suggests his ideas through unexpected images and similes is truly amazing. He welds, as it were, romantic, parnassian, impressionist, and naturalistic methods. Apart from this he anticipated symbolism and almost pronounced its manifesto when proclaiming that

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Baudelaire—like Edgar Poe—sifts the irrational subconscious elements through a deliberate cold analysis. The result is paradoxical: a kind of mathematical irrationality. In order to understand him properly one must have a key to his exclusive inner experiences on the one hand, and to his new means of expression on the other. Owing to his obscure symbolic language with its striking metaphors, Baudelaire is bound to be a poet for the few only and not for the general reader. In this

respect, too, his *Fleurs du Mal* is an important landmark. Even if we disagree with Henri Bataille, who regards Baudelaire's work as the summit of nineteenth century poetry, we cannot deny his influence all over Europe. Verlaine, Rimbaud, Laforgue, Mallarmé, Swinburne, d'Annunzio, Sologub—in short, most of modern symbolism, is in some way or other connected with him.

Baudelaire wrote also fifty exquisitely stylised "Little Poems in Prose," as well as some acute art criticism on Wagner, on romantic and impressionist painters. He might have been more productive had he been less harassed by debts, by his lack of will-power, by poverty and by the disease which he had contracted as a youth and which later proved fatal to him. In *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, we read this entry: "I have cultivated my hysteria with delight and horror. Now I have always a kind of frenzy, and to-day, January 23rd, 1862, I had a singular warning: I felt pass over me the wind of the Wings of Folly."

Four years later a stroke paralysed him, affecting his speech and his mental faculties. He died on August 31st, 1867.

VII

HUYSMANS AND STRINDBERG

I

WRITERS of transition periods are usually more interesting than creative. They are interesting by their complicated personalities, their inner struggles, their tragic impotence, and finally by the way in which they make —through their own works—their public confessions. Two modern authors are particularly remarkable in this respect. One of them is the Scandinavian, August Strindberg (1849–1912), and the other is the Frenchman of Flemish extraction, Joris Karl Huysmans (1848–1907). Both of them belong to the same period of European letters, and their works reflect the curious transition from naturalism to extreme mystic symbolism. A study of their development has an additional interest in so far as it shows the inner logic, one is almost tempted to say—the inner inevitability, of such a transition. They also illustrate that evolution which was typical of the best in European literature, say, between 1870 and the beginning of the twentieth century. For both started their career in the 'seventies when realism was already at its height.

The worship of bare facts, the optimistic belief in science and progress, the gospel of democracy, Darwin-

ism, the hasty theories of heredity and environment, the campaign against conservatism, clericalism and other mouldy "isms"—all this raised the prestige of the realistic school among the younger generation. This school had, moreover, the advantage of being highly understandable, since it happened to coincide with the democratic tendencies of modern culture, as well as with the rapid commercialisation of modern letters. It was not so much quality as quantity that it wanted in its readers. Its region was actual everyday life with its struggles, pains and problems. Yet in trying to give the "bare" truth of life, it often lost its hold on deeper reality by reducing it to the bald external facts of existence—an attitude which certainly tallied well with the fashionable doctrines of positivism and materialism. Mistaking the unappetising scum of life for the essence of life, it brought literature dangerously near to the clinical case and the police record, as is testified by numerous "naturalistic" novels, stories and plays all over Europe. Literary style and taste, too, were falling low, even to the level of ordinary journalese, while the fundamental problems of life were being treated at times with a somewhat unpleasant self-assurance, indulged in particularly by intellectual dilettantes and half-baked "apostles of progress."

A change was therefore needed, and before long it came. Disillusion with a purely "scientific" view of life, inner restlessness, a craving for higher valuations, a tendency towards more refined artistic methods, a profounder sense of reality (fostered also by the influence of Russian writers), and a fear of the growing plebei-

anisation of life—these were the chief causes of that reaction which took place in European literature and partly also in philosophy during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The tide of this reaction is well reflected by the so-called symbolist school; yet one should remember that the reaction itself was both broader and more significant than any particular literary school can claim to be. Various phases of that new orientation can best be studied in authors who belong to both periods. And the two outstanding figures of this stamp are Huysmans and Strindberg.

II

It is enough to glance at the early works (*Marthe*, 1876; *Les Sœurs Vatard*, 1879; *En Ménage*, 1881, etc.) of Huysmans in order to see that his teachers were Flaubert, the brothers Goncourt and Zola. Yet sometimes one cannot help feeling his affinity with quite a different spirit—that of Baudelaire. It was largely this spirit which fostered his innate boredom with contemporary bourgeois life, and also his aloofness from all that is common and commonplace. He found a relief only in his interest in art—an interest which resulted in several fine essays on the subject (*L'Art Moderne*, 1883, *Certains*, 1889, etc.). Gradually it made him an aristocratic recluse who preferred a sheltered artificial life to the noise of modern "progress."

This phase of his deliberate hothouse existence, among rare books, rare pictures, rare sensations and emotions—in the style of an enlarged "artificial para-

dise" after the manner of Baudelaire—was recorded by him in his *A Rebours* (1884), a book which became the Bible of many a decadent. *A Rebours* is perhaps the best key to the decadent mentality of only a few decades ago. Its hero, des Esseintes, is a degenerate aristocrat; but he is as refined as he is will-less. His over-developed æsthetic sense compels him to avoid all aspects of contemporary life. He hires a secluded mansion in a village near Paris and there he lives an artificial life, which is the exact reverse of our "practical" and active age. He lives—or vegetates—among exquisite old and modern books, pictures, perfumes, jewels and other objects indispensable for his unusual sensitiveness, which shrinks from every contact with the vulgarity of an industrialised mankind. The greatest shock for des Esseintes is when, owing to a breakdown, he has to leave his shelter. His only defence against reality is a passive protest which makes him stretch his hands after religion as his next refuge and also as *an aristocratic spiritual privilege* in an age of "free-thinking" and general intellectual levelling.

"In two days I shall be in Paris; like the rushing of the tide, the waves of human mediocrity rise up to heaven and they will swallow the shelter whose dikes I open against my will. Ah, my courage is going and my heart is troubled! Lord, have pity on a Christian who doubts, on an unbeliever who would like to believe, on a convict of life who embarks alone, in the night, under skies which are no longer lit up by the consoling lights (*fanaux*) of the old hope!"

Des Esseintes is driven to religion not by any religious

conviction, but by his æsthetic and emotional priggishness, combined with a complete atrophy of will. *Blasé* as he is, he has already indulged in everything rare and exceptional; the only hunting ground on which he can still hope to discover some new and strong sensation is that of religion and mysticism.

As Huysmans analysed in this character a phase of his own life, we must not be surprised to see the author himself drifting back to the Catholic Church. Barbey d'Aurevilly gave a reliable diagnosis of Huysmans in the same words which he had once applied to *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "After such a book the author has no other choice except the mouth of a pistol or the Holy Cross." *Là Bas*, *En Route* (1895), *La Cathédrale* (1898), *L'Oblat* (1903) mark the stages of his conversion, which found—in addition to his passion for art and his weariness of actual life—a powerful impulse also in his atavistic Christian instinct.

In *A Rebours*, Huysmans is still a sceptic and an æsthete, fascinated by the writers of the Roman decadence, such as Petronius and Apuleius. He relishes like a gourmand the rich "corrupt" Latin of early Christian writers, whose complicated sensibility was trying to find adequate linguistic expression. He also despises nature as much as Baudelaire or any Christian ascetic, only he does so for purely æsthetic reasons. In *Là Bas*, on the other hand, we find him already steeped in occultism, in mysticism, and even in satanism. He is attracted by the gruesome fifteenth-century criminal, Gilles de Rais, or "Bluebeard," and by the clandestine practices of modern satanists.

Towards the end of the book he even gives us a glimpse of a contemporary "black mass" celebrated in the very centre of Paris. Parallel with this, his interest in all things Catholic is steadily growing. So is his disgust with all things modern. The Middle Ages with their wholeness, their religiosity and their wonderful Christian art become more and more his refuge from our *bourgeois* modernity. The book ends in a note of extreme defiance to the spirit of our "progress."

Durtal (the hero of *Là Bas* and of his subsequent autobiographic books) has gone not very far beyond purely æsthetic interest in things spiritual and religious. But driven farther and farther away from modern life by disgust, by weariness, by exhausted sensuality, he barricaded himself in religion and became a conscious convert. This process is thoroughly analysed in Huysmans' next work, *En Route*. He depicts in it his fight with his rebelling senses and his temporary sojourn in a monastery (*La Trappe*), where the final act of his conversion takes place. Like his other works, this book too is full of excursions into Christian art, into archæology and mysticism. Among the simple monks, far from the bustle of life, he found a spiritual home after his heart's desire. Then he settled down in Chartres and wrote *La Cathédrale*, which is packed with remarks about the character and symbolism of mediæval art. In *L'Oblat*, however, he lives already within the precincts of a Benedictine monastery (Val des Saints), where he continues his æsthetic and archæological researches: amongst other things he gives much valuable information about the Gregorian plain chant. Owing to a law

promulgated by the Liberal Government, this community of monks had to emigrate, and Durtal (*alias* Huysmans) found himself once more in Paris. Only now he was—or endeavoured to be—an ardent Catholic and a mystic. A few years later Huysmans even went to Lourdes, where he studied the miracles at close quarters. He published the results of his observations in *Les Foules de Lourdes* (The Crowds of Lourdes, 1906), soon after which he died a devout Christian. His life was that of a disappointed "modern" who had become uprooted by his strong æsthetic sensibility. He went back to religion not in order to affirm life, but in order to find a shelter from it. His religiosity was as decadent as his mind.

III

After Strindberg had read, in 1897, *En Route*, he wrote about Huysmans in his autobiographic *Legends*: "Why did not this confession of an occultist fall into my hands before? Because it was necessary that two analogous destinies should be developed on parallel lines, so that one might be strengthened by the other. It is the history of an over-religious man who challenges the Sphinx and is devoured by her, that his soul may be delivered at the foot of the Cross. Well, as far as I am concerned, a Catholic may go to the Trappists and confess to the priest; for my part, however, it is enough that my sin be publicly acknowledged in writing."

Strindberg's fate is, in fact, analogous to that of Huysmans. Only if Huysmans is a typical Catholic

æsthete, Strindberg shows all the features of a Protestant Puritan even during the period of his materialism. Huysmans is complicated refinement—a mosaic full of curiously glittering but confused fragments which he wants to organise and bring to a certain wholeness. The young Strindberg is far from being an æsthete, but he is equally complicated. He himself says that in his youth he was a patchwork—"a compound of romanticism, pietism and naturalism." As he found it hard to co-ordinate those elements, they had to fight with each other. For a long time the "naturalist" tried to suppress the pietistic and romantic elements in him. This was his long phase of militant materialism during which he fought with all kinds of conservative traditions, particularly with religion, and was hailed as the champion of "modern ideas" in Scandinavia.

His first significant novel, *The Red Room* (1879) was a manifesto of the new "naturalist" creed in Sweden. His subsequent novels and stories, dealing chiefly with married life, and also his sex plays, reached at times the acme of naturalism. Examples are the second volume of *Married*, his autobiographic *The Son of a Servant*, his "Nietzschean" *Tchandala*, *At the Edge of the Sea*, and such plays as *The Father* (1887), *Lady Julie* (1888), *The Creditors*, etc. Yet underneath his frantic materialism there remained the suppressed pietist and romanticist. The first came out in his continuous reformatory and didactic propensities, while the second was noticeable above all in his attitude towards woman.

Strindberg's violent attacks on women caused at one time much wrath and rancour; yet at the bottom of his

notorious woman-hatred was nothing but a conception of love and of woman which was too romantic ever to be satisfied. He wanted to worship woman, he longed for a beautiful and pure love, and at the same time all the women he came across were too "experienced." The more he needed the Woman the more disappointed he became in actual women. Instead of satisfying his hidden craving, they filled him with disgust and with indignation. So it was natural that his strong potential idealism should turn into its own opposite: into an equally strong and one-sided cynicism full of hysterical resentment. He did everything in order to kill his most imperious need—that of finding his own Beatrice; and he could kill it to a certain extent only by proving to himself that women are so bad, so base and vulgar that they deserve nothing but contempt.

It was largely owing to his disgust with women and to his three unhappy marriages that he became so pessimistic, morose and inwardly restless. In seeking the Woman he was in essence seeking himself, his inner focus and balance, which he never found. He started as a sincere champion of those very "modern ideas" which Huysmans despised a priori, but he was soon driven into himself and compelled to become a brooding, self-asserting egotist. So after a short series of purely descriptive novels, such as the *People of Hemsö* (1887) and *The Fisherfolk* (1888), he returned to his former problem-plays on the one hand, and to his analytical books on the other. *The Confession of a Fool* (1893) was the first part of that autobiographic series of his which was continued in the *Inferno* (1897), i

Legends (1898), as well as in several other prose works and dramas of his last period.

His *Inferno* corresponds in many ways to *Là Bas* and *En Route*, by Huysmans. Strindberg sounds here a retreat from positivism, reveals an interest in occult matters, discovers the works of Swedenborg and undergoes—step by step—that inner process which brought him to his conversion. Strindberg's conversion was an act of inner self-preservation: his outward and inner life had become so disintegrated, so undermined by his own scepticism, his persecution-mania, his restlessness, as well as by his fear of existence, that he was on the verge of madness. He embraced Christianity and mysticism simply because with their help alone was he able to impose upon himself a focus strong enough to save him from the impending disintegration, from the fate of Nietzsche, with whom, by the way, he had been in correspondence. It was, above all, Swedenborg who "frightened him like a child back to God." His conversion bears on the whole a pathological character, and is full of despair, as we see in his *Inferno*, and—in a more condensed way—in his "Wrestling Jacob" (*Legends*). Strindberg now concentrated all his attention upon religious and occult studies, which he recorded chiefly in his *Blue Books* and in the plays of his last fifteen years. His new creed is expressed in the words he wrote down in 1910: "It is only through religion, or the hope for something better, and the realisation of the inner meaning of life as a time of probation, a school, possibly a house of correction, that we can bear life's burden with sufficient resignation." His *To Damascus* even ends

with the vision of a monastery, in which alone "dwell peace and purity."

These moods are mixed up in him with fear, superstition, and frequently also with states verging on madness; yet it is remarkable that, however unbalanced Strindberg may be, he can describe all the phases of his own derangement with utter lucidity. Like Huysmans he died a pious Christian, or at least a pious Swedenborgian.

IV

Such was the attempt on the part of Strindberg and Huysmans at an inner metamorphosis. Both of them were strongly introspective, and it was through their exaggerated introspection—through "psychology," in fact—that they came into contact with the irrational contradictions, puzzles and mysteries of the modern psyche. And their artistic expression of this contact was as different as were their temperaments.

Huysmans is an over-cultured aristocratic decadent, while Strindberg remains a proud plebeian—always personal, aggressive, more intellectual than "intelligent," more nervous than refined, and often somewhat blunt in his very subtleties. If the style of Huysmans is elaborately involved, impressionistic and full of unexpected associations by contrast, that of Strindberg is clear-cut, straightforward, ruggedly elemental and dramatic. Huysmans is a connoisseur and a contemplative impressionist who overwhelms and even tires his readers by the richness of his visual, emotional and musical nuances; instead of creating, he only describes

and analyses one single hero, that is, himself; and in doing so he depends more on memory than on imagination. Strindberg, on the other hand, is a dramatic analyst who can embody his own subjective states in striking dramatic situations. He is—potentially at any rate—one of the most powerful modern dramatists, and it is a pity that European theatres do not sufficiently appreciate his bold experiments. What can be more daring than his *Dreamplay*—that haunting medley in which he imitates the logical confusion of dreams, and yet remains convincing to the end? He has modernised even the historical drama, and made it palatable to our tastes (*Gustav Vasa*, *Charles XII*, *Eric XIV*, etc.). And as to his problem-plays, he knows how to blend them with an "expressionist" technique in such a way as to intensify his "complexes" into strange symbolic-realistic nightmares: his *Spook Sonata*, for instance.

What diminishes the value of Strindberg's plays (and also of his other works) is the fact that their intensity is frequently due to their morbid subjectivity rather than to purely æsthetic qualities. His art remains stuck, as it were, in the process of sublimation—instead of being crystallised by it and through it. The same can be said of his confused "religion." Yet his urge towards sublimation was the main cause of his strong creative urge as well. If Huysmans was more of an artist than a creator, in Strindberg the over-wrought creator prevails against the artist. His interest in religion, too, is entirely devoid of æsthetic preoccupations, while Huysmans was even after his conversion more concerned with

the gratification of his æsthetic needs than with God.

The main objection against the religiosity of both Huysmans and Strindberg is that it was not an act of inner heroism, but a mask for their resignation, for their flight from life. Instead of going forward to religion, they went back to it, and the direction in itself is here infinitely more important than any doctrines. The Grace of God is absent from their conversion, although it may not be always absent from their art; but in their art, too, they wavered to the end between soliloquies, diaries, descriptions, and treatises on those particular subjects in which they were interested. Both of them are more like torsos than finished figures. And their writings as a whole are an eloquent expression of the modern spiritual crisis, in so far as that can be reflected in literature. They are also an important link between realism and symbolism. No one who is interested in the deeper workings of modern mentality can pass by these two tragic wrestlers for a fuller inner life.

VIII

TOLSTOY AND NIETZSCHE[1]

I

A COMPARISON of Tolstoy and Nietzsche is both tempting and ungrateful. It is tempting on account of the interest of the theme itself, and ungrateful because this theme has already been treated on several occasions. The literary importance of these two men need no longer be discussed. It is taken for granted that Tolstoy's novels and stories are among the greatest in world-literature. And as for Nietzsche, there are at least a few points in his work on which both his admirers and his detractors are compelled to agree: his original poetic gift, his psychological depth, his style and his unparalleled mastery of the German language. Whereas it would be difficult to add anything new with regard to these aspects of the work of Tolstoy and Nietzsche, one can still find some new angle from which to view them as representatives of the modern mind, even if we are inclined to agree that their doctrines have lost much of the importance which used to be attributed to

[1] An address delivered at the University of London (King's College) before the Anglo-Russian Literary Society. A further development of certain ideas which are here suggested can be found in some of my other books, particularly in *Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness*, and in *Tolstoy* (Collins).

them, whether rightly or wrongly, a few decades ago. Certain sides of their teaching—particularly that of Tolstoy—are already covered with a thick layer of dust, which we could not help stirring up if we attempted a dry and academic exposition of their "philosophy." Fortunately, apart from literature, they both belong to the history of European *mentality* rather than to the history of European *philosophy*, which makes a difference. And so a bald summing up of their debits and credits, after the recipes of philosophic book-keeping, would not only be boring but even misleading. For both Tolstoy and Nietzsche philosophised, not in order to reveal their ultimate secrets, but in order to conceal them. This means that we can understand their ideas only after having sifted them through their own personalities; and the method for such a proceeding we can take from Nietzsche himself.

As is known, Nietzsche was an expert at looking through the keyhole into the workshop in which various ideas and ideals are being fabricated. And indiscreet as he was, he showed—largely through his own example—that the external appearances and the hidden inner motives of a philosophy may be two widely different things; that one's conscious and "unconscious" attitudes towards life-problems are often poles apart. But if this be so, then a doctrine—even a doctrine which has already passed its first youth—may acquire a new depth and a new interest as soon as we begin to investigate not the ideas, but those hidden roots of ideas of which the thinker himself is perhaps only half aware, or even entirely unaware.

Such an approach is, of course, worth while only with regard to those philosophers who are not mere "registering apparatuses," but real human beings—with human pains and passions, human flesh and blood. The fascination of a philosophy begins where one's inquiring intellect comes into active touch with real throbbing life, where profound thinking is *the result* of profound living, and not a cowardly substitute for it. This does not imply that philosophy ought to be replaced by mere "confessions" or analytical self-dissections, yet it cannot be denied that it is the *personal* touch which makes, for instance, Nietzsche's unsystematic philosophy more alive, more stimulating than hundreds of well-ordered and canonised academic systems. For whatever our opinion of Nietzsche's views may be, we feel in them all the pathos, all the passion, all the contradictions of life. This is why his attitude towards respectable official philosophies is similar to that of his Catholic double, Pascal, who said "*Se moquer de la philosophie c'est vraiment philosopher.*" Nietzsche said more or less the same thing when he wrote about the philosophers of his own kind: "We philosophers are not at liberty to separate soul and body, as the people separate them, and we are still less at liberty to separate soul and spirit. We are not thinking frogs, we are not objectifying and registering apparatuses with cold entrails—our thoughts must be continually born to us out of our pain, and we must, motherlike, share with them all that we have in us of blood, heart, ardour, joy, passion, pang, conscience, fate and fatality. Life—that means for us to transform constantly into light and

flame all that we are, and all that we meet with; we cannot possibly do otherwise."

II

So the very opening of our inquiry must lead to the question: what type of mentality can produce views such as those of Nietzsche and of Tolstoy? And on discovering that both of them belong to a similar type, we shall naturally ask: why is it, that in spite of this, they have arrived at entirely opposite views and values? Why do the Christian Tolstoy and the Antichristian Nietzsche exclude each other as thinkers and moralists, although psychologically they complete and explain one another? The answer is that they are complementary as the two antipodes of the same mentality. Their work is an attempt to solve one and the same inner dilemma—from opposite sides. In the case of both of them we see, moreover, that their philosophy was born not out of their brains, but out of their suffering. Their thinking had nothing to do with abstract "theories of knowledge," but it certainly had much to do with their own inner struggle, which was their chief and sometimes their only way to knowledge. In this struggle they needed their own "philosophy," now as a weapon, now as a refuge, and practically always as a mask—a mask before others and before themselves. Their principles were important to them not on account of the "truth," but because they proved an efficient means against their pain of existence, against their disgust with man and life, against their own division and self-division.

The latter means in this case not only the old and rather crude division between "flesh" and "spirit," but a highly modern phenomenon: the disintegration of the spirit itself into its antagonistic elements and values. The conflict between the impulse of man-god and that of God-man (to use Dostoevsky's terminology) takes place only on the spiritual plane, and its tension may be infinitely greater and more tragic than that between "flesh" and "spirit." Or take the conflict between the conscious and the subconscious truths, as depicted in Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov: on their own planes they are equally true, but no sooner have they met than they exclude each other. One and the same "truth" may, moreover, radically change all its inner content if transferred to a different plane—a fact which makes certain self-complacent truths and formulæ all the more problematic. The curious point, however, is that the stronger one's inner vitality, the more dangerous becomes this process of self-division and disintegration. In former times religious ideas alone were sufficient to save the individual from such a danger, by giving him a firm spiritual focus which not only held his personality together, but also linked him to the rest of mankind and to the Universe. In our age, however, religious ideas have lost the vital power which they once possessed; and so a modern seeker who wants to be "saved" imposes upon himself both the truths he needs and his belief in them. And the more he suspects that his own belief is shaky, the more passionately he will insist on its validity—until he becomes a fanatic of ideas not

because he believes in them, but because he is continuously afraid of not believing in them sufficiently, or of not believing in them at all.

Our modern idealism has thus little in common with that of our grandfathers. They were idealistic from *naïveté*, from unconscious hypocrisy, or from a dreamy romanticism which made them short-sighted with regard to many negative aspects of life. So they could afford to believe in it. Our problem, on the contrary, is: how to make ourselves believe in life, although we are compelled to feel and see too much of its negativeness—much more than we are able to bear. This feeling, joined by all the contradictions within and without ourselves, may become so oppressive as to threaten us with catastrophe. And since we possess no longer any unconditional values upon which to lean, the only outlet that remains in most cases is—*sauve qui peut*. It is at this point that life itself begins to philosophise, as it were. Our instinct of *inner* self-preservation begins to grope after such " truths " as would provide an escape, or at least a provisional escape, from our blind-alley. And if we insist on the universal validity of those truths, we do so certainly not for the sake of the universe.

Tolstoy and Nietzsche are good illustrations of this.

III

Let us turn for a moment to Tolstoy the " Christian." Who does not know the verve with which Tolstoy preached " religion," that is, his own version of Christ's

teaching? Yet the same man wrote to his aunt, the Countess A. Tolstoy, at the period of his seeking (1877) that religion was for him simply "the question of a person who is drowning and seeks something to clutch in order to avoid the inevitable ruin which he foresees with all his soul. During the last two years," he continues, "religion has seemed to me a possibility of salvation. . . . And it happens that just when I have seized this saving board, it seems to me that I am going with it to the bottom. . . . If you ask me what it is that prevents me from floating on the surface with the board, I shall not tell you, because I am afraid of disturbing your faith, and I know that faith is the greatest boon. I also know that you will smile at the idea that my doubts could disturb you: however, it is important to know not which of us reasons better, but what one ought to do to save oneself from drowning. This is why I will not talk to you about them; on the contrary, I shall be glad for you and for all those who are floating in the little boat that does not carry me. I have a good friend, a savant, Strahov, one of the best men I know. We agree considerably in our ideas about religion, and we are both convinced that without religion one cannot live, and yet we *cannot believe*."

The half-blind invalid Nietzsche gave away the secret of his own philosophy in a similar manner. He frankly confessed that to him philosophy was not a chase after some abstract truth or other, but a matter of self-preservation, a self-concocted medicine. "I will make no mention of the dangerous nature of my emotions," he wrote to Hans von Bülow in 1882, "but

this I must say, the altered manner in which I think and feel and which has even been expressed in my writings during the last six years has *sustained* me in life and almost *made* me quite healthy. What do I care when my friends assert that my present attitude of a ' free spirit ' is an eccentric pose, a *resolve* made, as it were, with clenched teeth and wrung by force and imposed upon my genuine inclinations ? So be it !—let it be a ' second nature ' ; but I will prove yet that only with this second nature was I able to become possessed of my first nature." In the preface to the second edition of *Human-all-too-Human* (1886) he is even more outspoken when proclaiming his own philosophy a kind of deliberate self-deception : " Supposing that I were reproached with good reason (because of this self-deception)," he says, " what do *you* know, what *could* you know as to how much artifice of self-preservation, how much rationality and higher protection there is in such self-deception—and how much falseness I *still* require in order to allow myself again and again the luxury of *my* sincerity ? . . . In short, I still live ; and life, in spite of ourselves, *demands* illusion, it *lives* by illusion . . but—there ! I am already beginning again and doing what I have always done, old immoralist and bird-catcher that I am—I am talking immorally, ultra-morally, beyond good and evil ! "

One could show by many other passages that the Antichristian philosophy of Nietzsche and the Christian teaching of Tolstoy had a similar inner impulse. Both Tolstoy and Nietzsche hoped to find in their doctrines a lifebuoy which would prevent them from drowning.

Only Nietzsche had courage enough to acknowledge this, while Tolstoy tried to hide his own secret behind pious, sometimes too pious, labels. The attitudes of both thinkers were thus dictated mainly by their personal needs. They both adopted those views and ideas which seemed to promise the most plausible escape from their inner conflicts. As the philosopher of the superman is a particularly salient case, a brief analysis of Nietzsche may be helpful.

IV

Nietzsche wears a thousand masks, and yet now and then he is surprisingly frank. In a moment of such frankness he disclosed that his doctrine was not only his medicine, but also his complement; it was that antithesis of himself on which he disciplined his decaying strength, his will to health and life. "Apart from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the reverse of such a creature," he says in *Ecce Homo*. "That energy with which I sentenced myself to absolute solitude, and to severance from all those conditions in life to which I had grown accustomed; my discipline of myself, and my refusal to allow myself to be pampered, to be tended hand and foot, to be doctored—all this betrays the absolute certainty of my instincts respecting what at that time was most needful to me. I placed myself in my own hands, I restored myself to health. This double thread of experience, this means to two worlds that seem so far asunder, finds in every detail its counterpart in my own nature; I am my own complement."

The continuous struggle of a conscious decadent with his equally conscious opponent is the very core of Nietzsche's philosophy and life. His was the fate of an invalid. So his only choice was that between resignation and resistance. He preferred the latter. And during his great physical suffering he increased both his resistance and his decaying vitality chiefly by a self-imposed vision of health. He was fascinated by the health of the ancient Greeks, by that of the exuberant Renaissance, and even by the brutal health of the barbaric " blond beast." His interest in Greece or in Renaissance was thus purely personal and " romantic." Even his central idea, the idea of the superman, had its roots in German romanticism, particularly in the writings of the now forgotten Georg Friedrich Daumer.

But if the invalid Nietzsche sang praises to health in all its forms, including the most brutal ones, Nietzsche the weakling sang hymns to hardness and manliness. It was his lack of real power that made him talk so much and so loudly of the " will to power." In addition, he was by nature a sentimentalist who became ashamed of his own sentimentality and wanted to overcome it. No sooner had he been assailed by a sentimental impulse than he invented a violent antidote and worked himself into the opposite mood. His notorious woman-hatred itself is thus analogous to that of Strindberg ; with this difference, that Nietzsche's need of an ideal woman with whom he could share everything was even greater—because of his physical debility. His attack on woman was, therefore, as strong as his ungratified craving for her.

A similar " psychology " is behind Nietzsche's hatred of Christianity. His anti-Christian outbursts were nothing but a continuous attempt on his part to rid himself of his own inherited Christian instincts. His ancestors had been pious pastors for generations. He himself, when entering the University of Bonn, matriculated first in theology. His temperament, his mind and mood were religious in the best sense of the word. He was a born Christian ascetic, and his life was moral beyond reproach. For all that he turned, with unparalleled vehemence, against both Christianity and its moral doctrines. And the reason was simple : in the case of Christianity, too, it was Nietzsche the doctor who attacked Nietzsche the patient. Consciously he considered Christianity a religion of resignation, and resignation in his case meant the line of least resistance, that is, weakness. It was the heroic-ascetic strain in Nietzsche's nature that turned all the more decidedly against a religion of solace and soothing the more he knew how *comfortable* such a religion could be in his position. He chose defiance and the ecstasy of defiance. Like a modern Prometheus he preferred pain to submission, and as the greatness of his pain was always a proof of the greatness of his own endurance, he saw in such an attitude the only possible realisation of his strength. In the exercise of power over himself he found an outlet for his own " will to power."

The obvious danger to this practice of his lay in those philosophies or religions which preached submission and the comfort of submission. So he discarded his first teacher, Schopenhauer ; he discarded also

Wagner—not from hatred but from fear : both Schopenhauer's philosophy and Wagner's " mystical " and " soothing " music were among those temptations which threatened to weaken his endurance, his defiant struggle against fate. An even more dangerous temptation was lurking for him in that spirit of Christian religion which he had inherited with his blood. It was not a superficial understanding of Christianity that made Nietzsche so anti-Christian ; he knew much, he knew perhaps all about the deeper side of that religion, yet he attacked it because he wanted to destroy its attractions so far as he himself was concerned. In order to succeed in this, he had to devise such a distorted picture of Christianity as would lend itself best to his onslaught. So he came to see in it only masked impotence, cant and cowardice on the part of the unsuccessful ones who have transferred their suppressed appetites into a world beyond, trying to make a virtue out of their own weakness.

Nietzsche conceived Christianity as a purely " decadent " religion, because he projected into it much of that decadence which he felt within himself, and which he wanted to get rid of. As his campaign against the Christian religion was also a campaign against his own decadent double, he fortified himself against a possible retreat in every way. Hence he turned against all religion with an almost religious vehemence. Anxious to destroy the very possibility of a spiritual conception of man and life, he looked round for allies. And he found them. He found them in positivism, in biology, at times even in sophisticated rationalism *à la* Voltaire.

Like a Jesuit, he availed himself of every trick, of every weapon, in order to reach his end. Yet his subconscious " decadent " instincts could never quite submit to his conscious convictions. Time and again he tried to cope with that inner tension of his which, amongst other things, was responsible also for the quality of his style. Eventually he made out of his philosophy a sort of forced marriage between biology and metaphysics, as can be proved by his doctrine of " Eternal Recurrence "; or by certain aspects connected with his interpretation of Dionysos. Moreover, his pathos is not the cold pathos of a thinker, but that of a religious prophet—even when he remains entirely on the plane of biology.

It was through his self-analysis that Nietzsche diagnosed the entire modern epoch. And he prescribed for it the same medicine of which he himself was most in need. Having rejected Christianity within himself, he wanted to throw it out of human life and culture as a whole. This is why he became an implacable detector of all " Christian " elements in contemporary humanity with its democracy, its tendency towards standardisation, and its confusion of all values. Can there be anything more violent than his poisonous invectives in the *Genealogy of Morals*, in *Human-all-too-Human*, in the *Anti-Christ*, and *Thus Spake Zarathustra?* Yet Nietzsche was aware that his anti-Christian zeal was curiously connected with its opposite Christian (i.e., *true* Christian) pole, and even derived from it its impetus. Thus he wrote, " The Christianity of my forbears reaches its logical conclusion in me : a stern intellectual conscience, fostered and made by Christianity itself,

turns against Christianity; in me Christianity raises itself and overcomes itself."

V

If Nietzsche's paganism can be defined as suppressed Christianity, Tolstoy's so-called Christianity was largely suppressed paganism; for in the same way as Nietzsche was, in many respects, a potential Christian of the best type, Tolstoy—or at least that which was most vital in Tolstoy—was potentially pagan. It is enough to read the works he wrote before his "conversion" to feel in him the force of his elemental pagan nature. While Nietzsche was an uprooted modern man, a man entirely "out of season" (unzeitgemäss), Tolstoy seemed to be so much rooted in the soil and in the simple people of his country that even his artistic vision and intuition were in essence those of a primitive pagan, or of a child, who is still half-immersed in the "prehistoric" collective group-soul from which he seems to draw psychic vitality, inspiration, clairvoyance, and the *instinctive* knowledge of things. The uncanny artistic genius of Tolstoy was due above all to his organic (subconscious) touch with his own race and soil. His pantheistic universalism on the one hand, and his naïve, childlike egotism on the other, were also connected with it. But this can be easily explained. What is less clear is the fact that Tolstoy's moralising and ascetic propensities, too, were conditioned by his full-blooded paganism, and this for various reasons. One of them lay in the very intensity of some of his instincts, which were always ready to go beyond the

line of good and evil, to degenerate into irrational passions, or simply into that gross sensuality by which Tolstoy had been often overwhelmed. He could cope with such dangers only by summoning all his moral control, by being always on his guard, and by trying to devise the most reasonable ways of conduct. Thus he became a self-conscious moralist already in his youth.

Whereas one cause of Tolstoy the moralist lay in the fear of his own passions, the second cause is to be sought in his attachment to life—an attachment so intense and profound as to make him revel in God's creation with an elemental joy and spontaneity. It was this increased joy of existence that confronted him before long with a fact which made that joy both passing and meaningless —the fact of Death. How could one fully enjoy any pleasure, once one has become aware that Death is lurking everywhere, and that the end of all things is decay and annihilation ? And the prospect of annihilation is the more dreadful the more we are attached to life. It is not hatred of life but too great a love of it that leads, in such cases, to negation and even to complete nihilism—provided we fail to find a meaning for life in the face of Death. This was, in short, the dilemma of Tolstoy at the time when he was tormented by the idea of suicide. " What I had lived by no longer existed," he says in his *Confession*, " and I had nothing to live by. My life came to a standstill. There was no life, for there were no wishes the fulfilment of which I considered reasonable. . . . The truth was that life was meaningless. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid

seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death—complete annihilation."

And so, if the first half of Tolstoy's literary activities was a continuous revel in full-blooded living life in spite of death, a revel which reached its highest pitch in *War and Peace*, the second half was an anxious search for a justification of life before death. It was largely in this search that Tolstoy mobilised all the resources of his reason in order to construct a rationalist "Christian" gospel of his own, into whose frame he now tried to squeeze not only his rich individuality, but also the entire social and political system of modern mankind. "Death, death, death awaits you every second," he exclaims in *What I Believe*. "Your life passes in the presence of death. If you labour personally for your own future, you yourself know that the one thing awaiting you is death. And that death ruins all you work for. Consequently, life for oneself can have no meaning. If there is a reasonable life, it must be sought elsewhere; it must be a life, the aim of which does not lie in preparing further life for oneself."

Tolstoy's subsequent life was nothing but a continuous game of hide and seek with the bogey called death. He found a shelter in that very Christian teaching which the invalid Nietzsche rejected with a hysterical vehemence. And in order to adapt it to his own needs Tolstoy remade it in such a way as to see in it what he wanted to see. His bias in this respect was at least as great as that of Nietzsche, only Tolstoy went in the opposite direction. It was largely a selfish flight from his own torments that prompted to him his

doctrine of extreme selflessness, behind which he vainly endeavoured to conceal his pessimism and resignation. For, if the essence of Nietzsche's paganism is utter defiance, the essence of Tolstoy's Christianity is utter resignation. To quote his own words, "Christianity does not give happiness, but safety; it lets you down to the bottom from which there is no place to fall." (Tolstoy's Diary of 1896.) And again: "To him who lives a spiritual life entirely, life here becomes so uninteresting and burdensome that he can part with it *easily*."

The diseased Nietzsche was too much aware of his physical debilities; therefore he asserted, through his will and philosophy, the "biological" man against his over-developed spirit. He summoned all the resources of his mind, chiefly in order to supply through them a stream of fresh vitality to his decaying body. Tolstoy again, whose dilemma was largely due to an exuberant vitality of instincts, turned against that very biological man whom Nietzsche exalted so highly. Nietzsche crucified his spirit on his flesh; Tolstoy crucified his flesh on his spirit. Yet neither of them was "saved." And the more they knew this, the more passionately they insisted on the fact that they were what they professed, or better, what they wished to be. The latent pagan, Tolstoy, did everything to prove that he was a Christian, only a Christian; and the latent Christian, Nietzsche, shouted all the time against Christianity, chiefly in order to convince himself and others that he was the fiercest anti-Christian ever born.

It was mainly on these impulses that Tolstoy and Nietzsche formulated their doctrines.

VI

It is now generally agreed that Tolstoy is not a religious, but only a moral teacher. And as a moralist he represents a good example of what Nietzsche labelled (rather disparagingly) the Socratic mentality. Tolstoy resembles Ibsen in so far as he combines a weak religious feeling with a very strong moral sense. Nietzsche again shows his religious temperament in every line, and most of all in those passages which are directed against religion. If the deism of Tolstoy often seems to be irreligious, the very atheism of Nietzsche is full of religious zeal. But quite apart from this, there is another difference between them—the difference in the planes of consciousness.

The evolution of human consciousness has to pass through three consecutive stages. The first of them is the pre-individual, or patriarchal, stage, in which the individual as such has not yet emerged from " nature," from the collective group-self. He is one with it because he is dissolved in it, as it were. This kind of consciousness, which knows no individual disharmony, no inner strife and struggle, is well symbolised in the legends of the lost paradise, or of the golden age. Then comes the individualised stage, which involves a complete disruption of the harmonious group-soul, in so far as every single person tries to assert his own self with all its rights, appetites and aspirations against other selves, as well as against the whole group. When the ultimate limit of this disruption has been reached, human beings either must perish in the general competition, in the war of

one against all, or pass on to that plane of "supra-individual" consciousness where every single ego enlarges to such an extent as to include the whole of humanity (as distinct from dissolving in it).

The second phase is the most terrible of all, for this is the phase of civilisation, of uprootedness, of division and self-division. It is here that many spirits get tired of their human Golgotha, and begin to call us "back to nature"—back to the happy childhood of humanity which is possible only on the first plane of consciousness. Rousseau was one of those who, instead of overcoming civilisation, ran away from it and suggested that it should be replaced by a primitive "natural" humanity. Another powerful voice calling us back to it was the voice of his disciple—Tolstoy.

Tolstoy's consciousness moves all the time along the line where the first and the second planes meet. And his instincts, as well as his intuitive genius, are so much rooted in the first plane (the plane of undifferentiated humanity) that he rejects a priori everything which goes against it, denying the very possibility of division or disruption. Nietzsche, on the other hand, represents the final limit of the second stage. His is that ultimate point of individualisation where one's ego must "die" in order to rise again on a higher plane (Goethe's *Stirb und Werde*), or it is bound to destroy itself through its own monomania and madness. Tolstoy values the human personality only in so far as it sacrifices itself to the compactness of the whole. This is why he proclaims any act of individual self-affirmation as the original sin, as the spring of all evil on earth. Nietz-

sche again discards God Himself—simply in order to procure to man that illimitable freedom of self-will which would make him the only divinity in the universe : the freedom of the individual man-god. As for Tolstoy, he talks all the time of God ; only he conceives God in such a way as to find in him the primeval antithesis to all individualisation whatever, a kind of Nirvana. Tolstoy's " voice of God " is in essence the voice of the pre-individual group-soul which he deifies and raises to the rank of the eternal Categorical Imperative : the Imperative of self-effacement and of absolute levelling of individuals on, or near, the line of zero.

Tolstoy is against all social differentiation because he sees in it only individual self-assertion, struggle and violence. He rejects the State and the whole of culture precisely because they are based on social differentiation. His gospel is, therefore, a gospel of uniformity. Driven to final deductions from his theories, Tolstoy denounces even education and habits of cleanliness as dangerous, since they, too, are elements of division among men. So he writes in *What to Do* : " To-day cleanliness consists in changing your shirt once a day, to-morrow in changing it twice a day. To-day the footman's hands must be clean ; to-morrow he must wear gloves, and in his clean gloves he must present a letter on a clean salver. And there are no limits to this cleanliness, which is useless, and objectless, except for the purpose of separating oneself from others, and of rendering impossible all intercourse with them, when this cleanliness is attained by the labours of others. Moreover, when I studied the subject, I became convinced that even what is com-

monly called education is the very same thing. . . Education consists of those forms and acquirements which are calculated to separate a man from his fellows, and its object is identical with that of cleanliness—to seclude us from the herd of the poor."

Owing to the same subconscious urge, Tolstoy goes against all external authorities, all laws, and likewise against all manifestations of the human self as such. It is on this premise that he constructs his theory of non-resistance, which is the inevitable logical outcome of his fear of division. Every personal resistance on our part, even if it be the resistance of evil, is in essence an act of self-assertion. As this act is necessarily directed against other fellow-beings, it intensifies their own aggressiveness, increasing thereby violence and division among men. According to Tolstoy, one must love one's enemies to such an extent as to let them do whatever they like. Even if they wish to kill us, we must passively sacrifice ourselves to this conception of love without raising a finger in self-defence. For if our self as such has no right to exist, we have no right to defend this self. Tolstoy goes so far as to forbid even resistance against raving drunkards or madmen. Thus, entirely forgetting that Christ Himself used violence when driving the traders out of the temple, he writes in a letter about Adin Ballou's rival theory of non-resistance: "I cannot agree with the concession he makes for employing violence against drunkards and insane people. The Master made no concessions, and we can make none. We must try to make impossible the existence of such people, but if they do exist we must use all possible

means and sacrifice ourselves, but not employ violence. A true Christian will always prefer to be killed by a madman rather than deprive him of his liberty."

The paradoxical side of Tolstoy's teaching is that on the surface he seems to stand for the greatest individual liberty, even for the liberty of madmen, while at the same time he denies the individual in the name of complete depersonalisation. In his work, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, he even tries to interpret the entire historical evolution of humanity simply as a process of depersonalisation, whose final goal ought to be the compact pre-individual group consciousness of an amorphic mankind. This final stage of human evolution Tolstoy calls the Kingdom of God. But in general he confuses two entirely different stages—the pre-individual and the supra-individual stage of human development—in such a way that even when his reasoning seems to point to the latter, his instincts and tendencies remain exclusively on the plane of the first, i.e., the amorphic stage. In other words, even when Tolstoy's formulæ about Christian universal love, peace and good-will are right, *the plane on which he employs them is not right.* Hence the great difference between the Christianity of Tolstoy and that of Solovyev, for instance. On many points, both of them use identical formulæ, and yet no one ironised Tolstoy's Christian teaching more than Solovyev (especially in his *Three Conversations*). He even proclaimed Tolstoy to be Anti-Christ and Tolstoy's God simply a clever impostor. Likewise he says that Tolstoy's Kingdom of God is

" only an arbitrary and vain euphemism for the Kingdom of Death."

VII

Being convinced that even in the greatest altruism there is a fair amount of veiled selfishness, Nietzsche was cynically frank about it. He must have been often ashamed of his own innate goodness and pity, otherwise he would hardly insist with such emphasis that the egoistic " will to power " is the *only* spring of our actions. Tolstoy again, who was in his personal life more selfish than Nietzsche (a feature with which he fought all the time), did everything to preach and propagate unconditional altruism. While Tolstoy's teaching has in view a stateless community of meek and good men united in that pre-individual love which alone " can give tranquillity and happiness on earth," the weakling Nietzsche sets up a claim for men who are stronger than their pity, men who can boldly look at life in its most horrid aspects, and yet make it worth living. Instead of an escape from reality, Neitzsche requires a tragic courage to it. Therefore, he insists on the creative value of hardness towards oneself and towards others. A hard and dangerous life is one of his first demands. For our strength and endurance grow in proportion with those dangers which we are able to overcome. In Nietzsche's opinion the *evil* side of existence is necessary for the very growth of life. It is also necessary for the sake of that higher goodness which comes not from weakness, but from one's overflowing power and abundance—that goodness and that

bestowing virtue at which only those arrive who have first conquered the right to it.

If Tolstoy's ethics are based on obligatory moral categories, the moral valuations of Nietzsche are above all those of taste. From the standpoint of his biological outlook, he is beyond good and evil only with regard to the so-called eternal moral values. But apart from this, he measures everything by what he calls noble and ignoble. And ignoble is for him all that comes from weakness and cowardice, as well as from the absence of a striving will to overcome the present man. To put it somewhat baldly, Nietzsche stands for the ultimate aristocratic-æsthetic, and Tolstoy for the ultimate democratic-ethical ideal of human society. The contrast between the two may be partly elucidated by the difference between *the morality of honour* and *the morality of pity*—the two moral codes which Europe has been mixing all the time without ever being able to reconcile them. Nietzsche and Tolstoy are the two extremes of this antagonism, and as such they are all the more interesting.

In conclusion it ought to be perhaps pointed out that both Tolstoy and Nietzsche have, in their moral theories, one substantial mistake in common: they both confused, or even identified individualism with egoism, selfness with selfishness. The result was that Nietzsche accepted selfishness in the name of selfness; Tolstoy, on the other hand, rejected selfness together with selfishness, because he did not care to distinguish it from the latter. They both used analogous methods of coping with their own dilemmas: each of them tried

to suppress one half of his personality for the benefit of the other half. But as suppression is not yet victory, they both remained in a state of warfare—that inner warfare by which the European consciousness is and will remain lacerated, until it finds some outlet upon a higher plane.

IX

CHEKHOV AND MAUPASSANT

I

One rarely finds two writers who complete and explain each other more fully than Chekhov and Maupassant. They are complementary by the features which they have in common, and even more by those in which they differ. Each of them is a born short-story writer, and although their genius is not first-rate, their productions, within their own limits, are first-rate. Each has devised a new technique of his own, as well as a new approach to reality. Each shows a strong laconic reserve, an unerring sense of proportion, and also that synthetic simplification which must not be confused with its reverse—primitive simplicity. At the same time they are both equally remote from "bookishness": their stimulus never comes from literature, but only from life. And here their attention is for the apparently smallest events and trifles, which they know how to make significant. "There is an unexpected side to everything," says Maupassant, "the smallest thing has something unknown in it; we must find it." It is this "something unknown" even in the smallest incidents that draws the attention of Chekhov and Maupassant. Discarding the old-fashioned

" plots " as artificial, they collect, as in snapshots, the casual scraps of daily existence. And in this process they avoid all that is sensational, affected, pretentious or posing. The most salient quality of these two men is their aversion to everything salient and declamatory, whether in thought, art or life. As if afraid of such temptations, they show in their tone and style a dry matter-of-factness and that deliberate naturalness which at times is in danger of becoming unnatural owing to its very exaggeration.

" At lunch there were very nice pies, crayfish and mutton cutlets; and while we were eating, Nikanor, the cook, came up to ask what the visitors would like for dinner. He was a man of medium height, with a puffy face and little eyes; he was close-shaven and it looked as though his moustache had not been shaved, but had been pulled out by the roots." This is the usual tone in which Chekhov begins and relates his stories. And now a typical beginning of one of Maupassant's sketches: " Nobody was surprised by the marriage of Maître Simon Lebrument and Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier. Maître Lebrument had just purchased the notary practice of Maître Papillon; of course, a good deal of money had to be paid for it; and Mademoiselle Jeanne had 300,000 francs ready money, in bank notes and money at call. Maître Lebrument was a handsome young man, who had style—a notarial style, a provincial style—but anyhow, style, and style was a rare thing at Boutigny-le-Rebours."

Conversational simplicity, almost baldness, cannot go further. The same absence of anything showy

we see in their themes and ideas. They never swagger about any "higher mission," and instead of setting out to solve problems, they are modest enough only to state them, but to state them with all the condensed artistic power at their disposal. Even when expressing their own personal views and preferences, they do so in a detached objective way—as artists and not as preachers or moralists. They know too well that in art one must be *individual* without being *personal*, and that the writer who confuses the two attitudes is on the wrong track altogether. Of course, both Chekhov and Maupassant had a distinct perspective of life which prompted to them certain themes, moods and characters at the expense of others; and this perspective was largely conditioned by the epoch in which they lived. For both of them were children of their age—an age of scepticism, of tedium, and of "conglomerated mediocrity" which has made the whole of modern life so Philistine and so noisily dull. They were both doomed to be its onlookers, its chroniclers, and its victims.

II

Chekhov is the finest miniature painter of the decaying and bankrupt Russian intelligentsia during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. That atmosphere of hopelessness and disintegration which had permeated the whole of Russian life after the active 'sixties and which had found such a terrifying reflection already in Saltykov's *Golovlyev Family*, is the very air one breathes in most of his sketches, as one breathes it

also in Garshin's stories, Nadson's poems, and Chaikovsky's music. Various single qualities of Chekhov's writings can be linked up with earlier Russian authors, particularly with Turgenev, with whom he shares also his suggestive manner. Yet, with all these casual resemblances, Chekhov's work as a whole remains profoundly original and in its way unique.

Chekhov started his literary career as a humorist. Fun for fun's sake—this seems to have been the aim of his early sketches. And his humour was rather elementary: the humour of farcical situations whose only object was to make the reader laugh. But Chekhov's laughter, too, like that of the "humorous" Gogol, gradually became saturated with hidden sadness, until at last he forgot to laugh and began only to smile his evasive smile. This change took place in him some time between 1887 and 1889, when he wrote his *Tedious Story* and his first play, *Ivanov*. "There is a sort of stagnation in my soul," he writes to Suvorin, on 4th May, 1889. "I explain it by the stagnation in my own personal life. I am not disappointed, I am not tired, I am not depressed, but simply everything has become less interesting." At the age of twenty-nine he became a moody "superfluous man." The stagnant atmosphere of his country began to paralyse him; and he could cope with the danger only by sublimating it through his artistic creation. The boredom, the staleness and vulgarity he saw around thus became the raw material of his writings.

Yet Chekhov preserved a strong ethical and humanitarian vein even during the greatest artistic detachment.

He would not have been a Russian had he shown no preoccupation with that "sense of life" which used to be one of the central problems of the generation that had preceded him. Finding ugliness, injustice and the void wherever he looked, he soon became aware that the growth of material "progress" may have nothing in common with the growth of true life; that some higher unifying idea or value was missing, without which no activity can be complete and creative. But he could find no remedy, no help; the fault seemed to be at the very root of life. Hence his resignation, his fatalism, and also his repeated endeavours to raise his art above mere criticism of life—a thing which usually was beyond his power, as it is beyond the power of most modern artists.

"Science and technical knowledge are passing through a great period now, but for our sort it is a flabby, stale, dull time," he complains in a letter. "We lack 'something'; and that means that lift, lift the robe of our muse, and you will find an empty void. Let me remind you that the writers who, we say, are for all time, or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic: they are going towards something and are summoning you towards it, too, and you feel, not with your mind, but with your whole being, that they have some object. . . . And we? We paint life as it is, but beyond that nothing at all. . . . We have neither immediate nor remote aims, and in our soul there is a great empty space. We have no politics, we do not believe in revolution, we have no God, we are not afraid of ghosts,

and I personally am not even afraid of death and blindness. One who wants nothing, hopes for nothing, and fears nothing cannot be an artist." (*Letters of A.C.*, Chatto and Windus.)

Such became the *leitmotif* of Chekhov's art. Had he been less sober, less honest with himself, he could easily have adopted some "idea" which would give him a comfortable optimistic illusion. But his clear sight, clear mind, and his extreme inner honesty were the chief obstacles in the way to any illusions of the sort. Instead of abandoning his blind alley on false pretences, he preferred to face it to the end—to face it with a continuous and yet impotent longing to get out of it. The boisterous humorist, Chekhonte (for this was his first *nom de plume*) thus became a poet of futility. In this consisted both his greatness and his curse.

III

If Chekhov depicted the Russia of Alexander III, Maupassant took up France of the *fin du siècle*. And he described it with the same fidelity of vision, with the same calm and impartiality which we find in Chekhov. Being a typical *Normand*, he was at his best when drawing his native figures—whether peasants, bourgeois, or gentry. Yet he was equally at home in Paris, on the Riviera, and even in exotic Africa.

Maupassant's perspective of life is analagous to that of Chekhov. If Chekhov saw the whole of human existence from the angle of Philistine Russia, Maupassant saw it from the angle of Philistine France,

which in the end led to the same disgust. Being, however, an aggressive masculine nature, Maupassant reacted in a masculine way. He resented the ugliness and meanness in men: the "human-all-too-human" in what they do, and even more in what they are. He resented it all the more because of his own stifled desire to make out of life a thing of joy and beauty. "Ay, verily, I do feel on certain days such a horror of all that is, that I long for death," he confesses in his *Sur l'Eau*. "The invariable monotony of landscapes, faces and thoughts, becomes an intensely acute suffering. The meanness of the universe astonishes and revolts me, the littleness of all things fills me with disgust, and I am overwhelmed by the platitude of human beings."

Maupassant—like Chekhov—did not and could not feel at home in a world which has converted life into drab existence, passions into cold perversities, love into mere appetite, great ambitions into their hideous caricatures, and the whole of mankind into a universal *bourgeoisie* with patented, ready-made souls and minds. It was Maupassant's disgust with his own age that permeated most of his writings with an atmosphere of doom and disguised melancholy, akin to that which we find in Chekhov. But while Chekhov transmuted it into inoffensive irony, or, later on, into poetic sadness, Maupassant preferred to vent it through his deliberate aloofness, his cynicism, and his aggressive sarcasms. Moreover, a similar vision of life produced in both writers a similar technique: that of shorthand realism, which is equally remote from the rounded-up "plots" and from the unselec-

tive naturalism of their contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

In the Preface to his *Pierre et Jean*, Maupassant tries to explain this new genre when saying that a modern writer's skill should not be concentrated upon intricate plots, but on the "happy grouping of small but constant facts," since his aim is not the extraordinary, but the obvious: the "history of the heart, soul and intellect in their normal condition." He should not strive after a photographic representation of this history either, but only after a maximum of probability. His object is *le vraisemblable* rather than *le vrai*. In other terms, "truth in such works consists in producing a complete illusion by following the common logic of facts and not by transcribing them pell-mell as they succeed each other."

Keeping to this rule, Maupassant split up French naturalism into countless independent incidents—treated with a classic sense of selection, of economy, of lucidity, and of taste. In Chekhov, too, the broad and sustained epic vision of the former Russian realists disintegrated, as it were, into hundreds of detached episodes, which he embodied in miniatures of a strangely new and suggestive kind. This method, however, was not casual in either of them. Apart from certain purely technical reasons, it was the result of a new "atomised" vision of reality, and this again had been conditioned by various psychic causes. For an atomised vision of life is usually the result of an atomised consciousness. As soon as our inner self has lost its focus, its dynamic "unifying idea," our

entire being becomes centrifugal, or even utterly disorganised. And this process is bound to be fostered by the bustling hurry of modern existence, which has less and less time for anything that goes beneath the surface. The variety of life is no longer the functional variety of a great organism ; it is the mechanical variety of a confused mosaic. Consequently, our perception of life, too, is mosaic-like, in so far as we are really " modern." Life becomes identified with the sum total of its external incidents and moments—each of them equally casual, disjointed and flitting. Impressionism in painting was partly the result of this. And so was the impressionism of modern letters. Indeed, writers cannot even help becoming episodic. Chekhov complains (in a letter to Korolenko, 1888), while writing his first long story, *In the Steppe* : " Each page turns out a compact whole like a short story, the pictures accumulate, are crowded and, getting in each other's way, spoil the impression as a whole. As a result one gets, not a picture, in which all the details are merged like stars in the heavens, but a mere diagram, a dry record of impressions."

The same could be said also of Chekhov's plays and of Maupassant's novels. Yet this episodic casualness has in both of them a unity " behind the scenes "—the unity of their own fundamental attitude towards life, whose genuineness often deepens their very realism into something symbolic : behind their casual incidents and trifles one can feel at times that great pain which is at the heart of all existence.

IV

A further trait which these two writers have in common is their strong racial flavour. Is not Maupassant as typical of the French as Chekhov is of the Russians at their best? Many a sketch of his strikes one by its *gauloiserie* and by a humour reminiscent of the *fabliaux*. And there is nothing more French than Maupassant's wit and his dexterity in managing various, sometimes rather risky ambiguities (*sous-entendus*). As a character again, Maupassant is a fine mixture of a robust *Normand*, a poet and an experienced Parisian *viveur*. He is sensitive and sensuous, virile and decadent, cynical without being vulgar, cold without being forbidding. He is more subtle and intelligent than profound, or when he is profound, he himself does not care to be aware of it. At the same time he is always self-possessed, alert, lucid, witty and full of taste in whatever he writes. Balzac, Hugo and Zola have more talent than taste, while Maupassant balances the two in a perfect fashion. Needless to say, his sense of logic and precision makes him avoid everything misty and "mystical." Even themes taken from the world of madness or semi-madness (his *Le Horla*, for example) he treats with a classic concreteness, and with invariably fine literary manners.

To feel the charm of Maupassant's literary manners, it is enough to compare him with such a showy "star" of letters as d'Annunzio. The difference between the two is that between a born aristocrat and a talented

poseur who is always dressed up, always in front of a mirror, and reeking of the choicest perfumes *à la mode*. Maupassant knows the value of simplicity, and therefore ignores the temptation of decorative brilliance; while d'Annunzio mistakes too often brilliance for beauty, indulging in a kind of hollow and spluttering "grandeur," which becomes the more bombastic the more he wants to conceal his own inherent coldness and gilded artificiality. What a relief one finds after d'Annunzio in the sober severity of Maupassant or in the naturalness of Chekhov! For, if Maupassant strikes one by his fine literary manners, Chekhov's art at its best seems to be somewhere above manners, above art itself. When reading Chekhov we are at times almost hypnotised by his *human* inwardness, which is even stronger because of its reserve. If Maupassant impresses us by his virile qualities, whether good or bad, Chekhov draws our sympathies by his feminine warmth, which is too sincere to degenerate even for a moment into sentimentality.

In this respect, Chekhov the artist expresses Chekhov the man. Gorky relates that Tolstoy himself could not help being fascinated by him: "He loved Chekhov, and, when he looked at him, his eyes were tender and seemed almost to stroke Anton Pavlovich's[1] face. Once, when Anton Pavlovich was walking on the lawn with Alexandra Lvovna (Tolstoy's daughter), Tolstoy who at the time was still ill and was sitting in a chair on the terrace, seemed to stretch towards them, saying in a whisper: 'Ah, what a beautiful, magnificent man:

[1] Chekhov's name and patronymic.

modest and quiet like a girl ! And he walks like a girl. He's simply wonderful.' " And Gorky, too, defines him as a beautifully simple man who " loved everything simple, genuine, sincere, and had a peculiar way of making other people simple."

We are hardly wrong in applying the same definition to the best examples of Chekhov's art as well. He is more " scrappy " and less definite than his French colleague. Yet he knows how to be strong and suggestive by his very vagueness, and by that delicacy which never allows him to take liberties either with his Muse, with his themes, or with his readers. His reserve seems to be due, not to deliberate artistic tact and discipline (as is the case with Maupassant), but to the delicate fastidiousness of his warmth and pity. Chekhov represents in a way the finest sublimation of that expansive Russian " soul," which sometimes makes one feel very uneasy precisely by its abundance of undisciplined emotion. He possesses one of the rarest gifts : the gift of great intimacy without a tinge of familiarity.

Maupassant's sensitiveness is chiefly that of refined nerves ; the sensitiveness of Chekhov again comes from his innate but unsatisfied sympathy with all life. While Maupassant often looks upon his fellow-beings as a collection of vulgar fools, fit only to become his literary cannon-fodder, Chekhov never shrinks from the level of average humanity. He hates the Nietzschean " pathos of distance," as if he were ashamed of being an exception. " Let us be ordinary people," he insists ; and despite his pessimism, he is always ready

to believe in the latent dignity of man. "Man will only become better when you make him see what he is like," we read in his note-book. This is why he never confuses mankind's vices with mankind itself, as Maupassant often does. There is a broad tolerance in his very irony and sarcasms. Maupassant would be in his own element among elegant but too experienced bachelors after supper, when the air is permeated with the scent and smoke of cigars. We are so carried away by his clear metallic voice, by his style and his clever *pointe* that we quite overlook his cruel grin. He is always an interesting companion, without ever caring to be anybody's friend. The charm of Chekhov, on the other hand, is in his simple, natural friendliness. However subdued and sad his voice may be, his lips never grin; they smile instead with a kindly, sometimes humorously disgusted, yet always understanding and forgiving smile—perhaps the most tolerant smile in modern literature.

With all their surface objectivity, neither Chekhov nor Maupassant were able to conceal their own intimate selves, and they were both aware of this. Maupassant even dared to ridicule, in the Preface to his *Pierre et Jean*, the dogma of the "disinterested" objective reality in an author's work. "How childish it is, indeed, to believe in this reality," he says, "since to each of us the truth is in his own mind, his own organs! Our own eyes and ears, taste and smell, create as many different truths as there are human beings on earth. And our brains, duly and differently informed by those organs, apprehend, analyse and decide as differently as

if each of us were a being of an alien race. Each of us, then, has simply his own illusion of the world—poetical, sentimental, cheerful, melancholy, foul or gloomy, according to his nature! And the writer has no other mission than faithfully to reproduce this illusion, with all the elaboration of art which he may have at his command. . . . All the great artists are those who can make other men see their own particular illusion." In a word, with whatever "scrupulous exactitude" a writer may try to describe actuality as it is, he cannot get away from his own subjective perspective of life, which is conditioned partly by external factors, and partly by his own temperament.

V

Among those inner reasons which were decisive for the character of the works of Chekhov and Maupassant may be mentioned the fact that both writers were born idealists and yet incapable of believing in ideals. In the same way they were both great lovers of life and yet compelled to suppress, as it were, that innate love of theirs. Maupassant, for example, loved the earth and life in an elemental and perhaps too sensuous a way. In spite of his Parisian flourish he still remained a semi-pagan Epicurean, who knew how to revel in earthly beauty, in earthly delights and passions. His artistic vision itself was sharpened chiefly by his voluptuous, animal delight in things. This is one of the reasons why he described so wonderfully the peasants of his native *Normandie*—those sturdy, shrewd and primitive beings

who seem to be a part of their own soil, or of Mother Nature herself.

" I enjoy everything as an animal does," Maupassant confesses in his *Sur l'eau.* " If my spirit, restless, agitated, hypertrophied by work, bounds onward to hopes that are not those of our race, and then, after having realised that all is vanity, falls back into a contempt for all that is, my animal body at least is enraptured with all the intoxications of life. Like the birds, I love the sky ; like the prowling wolf, the forests. I delight in rocky heights like a chamois ; the thick grass I love to roll in and gallop over like a horse ; and, like a fish, I revel in the clean waters. I feel thrilling within me the sensations of all the different species of animals, of all their instincts, of all the confused longings of inferior creatures. I love the earth as they do, not as other men do. I love it without admiring it, without poetry, without exultation. I love with a deep and animal attachment, contemptible yet holy, all that lives, all that grows, all we see ; for all this, leaving my spirit calm, excites only my eyes and my heart ; the days, the nights, the rivers, the seas, the storms, the woods, the hues of dawn, the glance of a woman, her very touch.

" The gentle ripple of water on the sandy shore, or on the rocky granite affects and moves me, the joy that fills me as I feel myself driven forward by the wind, and carried along by the waves, proceeds from the abandonment of myself to the brutal and natural forces of creation, from my return to the primitive state !

" When the weather is beautiful as it is to-day, I feel in my veins the blood of the lascivious and vagabond fauns of olden times. I am no longer the brother of mankind, but the brother of all creatures and all nature ! "[1]

This irrational physical love of life—the love " before logic " and in spite of logic—Maupassant shared with another hidden pagan, Leo Tolstoy. But he shared with Tolstoy also his animal fear of death, a fear which was fostered by an incurable disease contracted by him about 1880, and which eventually sapped not only his pleasures but also his life. Like the aged Tolstoy—who, by the way, was a great admirer of his French confrère —Maupassant, too, began looking upon life from the standpoint of death. He felt at last its shadow looming everywhere. Some people go towards death in a comfortable carriage, while others, less fortunate ones, trudge along on foot. This was the only difference he saw in human fates. Life seemed stupid and meaningless. It was like an idiotic farce for which no one is responsible, and all he could look forward to was decay and annihilation.

VI

Such were the reasons which turned Maupassant's enormous vitality into negation and spite at life. He cursed life because in essence he loved it too much. His entire attitude towards it was similar to the attitude towards love on the part of one of his heroes, of whom he says : " He would have exalted love, but the more

[1] Translation by Laura Ensor (Routledge).

he knew it the more he cursed it." Instead of real enjoyment there remained only his insatiable *will to enjoy*, a will which was the more imperative the more he realised its utter futility. "Ah, I have coveted all, and delighted in nothing," he confessed. "I should have required the vitality of a whole race, the varying intelligence, all the faculties, all the powers scattered among all beings, and thousands of existences in reserve; for I bear within me every desire and every curiosity, and I am compelled to see all and grasp nothing. From whence, therefore, arises this anguish at living, since to the generality of men it only brings dissatisfaction? Wherefore this unknown torture, which preys upon me? Why should I not know the reality of pleasure, expectation and possession? It is because I carry within me that second sight which is at the same time the power and despair of writers. I write because I understand and suffer from all that is, because I know it too well, and, above all, because, without being able to enjoy it, I contemplate it inwardly in the mirror of my thoughts."

This inability to enjoy probably drove him all the more to æsthetic activities—since on the æsthetic plane he could derive creative enjoyment even from his disgust. Disgust became, in fact, one of his creative stimuli. In his very first story, the matchless *Boule de suif* (1880), he shows all the irony, spite, and veiled indignation of which he was capable. And this spite only grew with the years. But while his suppressed idealism turned into tedium, his innate pagan love of life degenerated into mere sensuality. Unlike Tolstoy,

who began to fight his "flesh" with moral (or moralising) remedies, Maupassant surrendered to his sensual enjoyments as he had to his tedium. He indulged in both at one and the same time. In his early *Vers* (1880), his sensuality is still mixed with a kind of pantheist paganism. But soon sex began to assert itself on its own account, and sometimes to the verge of obsession. Hence his frequent, or even continuous flirtation with its less palatable aspects. With a hidden chuckle, he describes again and again the notorious triangle. He gloats, as it were, over all sorts of adulteries, jealousies, violations, depravities, houses of ill-fame, and *crimes passionelles*.

It is interesting that both Maupassant and Tolstoy reduced sexual love to mere appetite—with this difference, that the "converted" Tolstoy rose against sex for moral reasons, while Maupassant found in it one of the few relaxations from the great boredom of life as a whole. Conceiving love chiefly as the animal *libido*, Maupassant saw in man only the male and in woman only the female. And he became a brilliant painter of the modern female: from the prostitute and the farm-servant to the refined aristocrat and the subtly depraved *Parisienne*.[1] He knows best of all woman the mistress; he is also familiar with her opposite: the devoted mother type (Jeanne, Tante Lison in *Une vie*). Yet the woman as such, the woman in the best sense of the

[1] It may be significant that Chekhov's most extensive journey was his expedition to the Sakhalin island (the island of the convicts condemned for life), while Maupassant went to North Africa, which he described with all the *verve* of a sensualist.

word, he does not care to know. Or he does not believe in her. The only notable exception is perhaps his Mme. Andermatt in *Mont-Oriol.*

His men, too, are for the most part greedy and unscrupulous males. With them sex loses its mystery, and love is replaced by love-making with the usual aim and result. But as naked sex, sex which is not ennobled by love, only destroys and degrades without giving anything except the cheap " victory," its final issue is weariness and void. One begins to hate it, even to rebel against it, in the same measure as one feels its growing tyranny. Maupassant rebelled, or tried to rebel, against it on several occasions. Take certain passages of *Une vie,* of *Bel Ami,* or the whole of his *La femme de Paul.* One could quote numerous other instances. Yet he was too much of a Parisian, of a *viveur,* and of a sceptic in these matters to devise that higher form of love which would raise and redeem sex as such. So he remained tossed to the end between the two poles of his erotic life : his obsession with sex, and his periodical disgust with it.

VII

Chekhov, too, like Maupassant, was a wounded idealist, a man whose cravings, ambitions and illusions had been smashed against the wall of reality. The gay and " funny " Chekhonte was practically buried after his *Tedious Story* and *Ivanov.* But while Maupassant usually reacted to life with rancour, the later Chekhov shows baffled resignation, meekness and poetic

tenderness. And he is most tender when dealing with his favourite hero—the "superfluous man," or simply the will-less failure.

The cult of the failure is, or used to be, characteristic of Russian literature. Its ever-recurring type, the "superfluous man," has a long ancestry. He may be an illegitimate child of Byronism, yet with Pushkin's Aleko (*The Gypsies*) and Onyegin he became thoroughly naturalised and had a long gallery of descendants: Lermontov's Pechorin, Herzen's Beltov (in *Whose Fault?*), Goncharov's Oblomov, Turgenev's Rudin, and many other less distinguished variations. He became a real pet of the Russian authors. To think of the sympathy which Goncharov has wasted on his weak Oblomov! And the secret warmth with which Turgenev, and after him Chekhov, treat a whole pageant of their own Oblomovs! Chekhov, in particular, tacitly condemns not the weak, but the strong and successful man, although on the surface he seems to long for him. Sensitiveness and failure on the one hand, coarseness and success on the other—these are his synonyms. According to him, those people only who are coarse enough not to feel the haunting complexity of human lives and destinies, are free to direct their will towards material activities, towards success and "strength." But what is the use of such strength? Is not its other and more legitimate name Philistinism triumphant?

This is one of the reasons why Chekhov's "strong" characters are, as a rule, one-sided, vulgar and repellent. Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* is the only active type

in the play, yet our sympathies are not with him but with his helpless victims. The practical Natasha in the *Three Sisters* is the very acme of Philistine vulgarity, while the equally practical Aksinya in *The Ravine* is simply a disgusting animal. And who could stand the company of the "successful" young doctor Hobotov in *Ward No.* 6, or that of the self-complacent savant von Koren in *The Duel?* The old Professor in the *Uncle Vanya* also belongs to the successful ones.

But how different becomes the tone of Chekhov whenever he deals with failures, with the countless Hamlets of Russian life. He often lavishes on them all the warmth, all the seductive charm of his art. Take his wonderful *Three Sisters*. Take scores of other characters, characters whom we get fond of in spite of their willlessness, in spite of all their defects. If Chekhov becomes intolerant at all, it is with regard to "strong" people. Otherwise he never condemns and does not want to condemn. If Maupassant regards man as a civilised human beast who is stupid with all his cunning, depraved and sexually greedy, Chekhov prefers to see in men puppets of some irrational force behind life rather than hold them responsible for all the wickedness of which they are capable. Besides, does not man often become wicked because he resents that evil of existence which he himself has to endure? There are no guilty ones, because in essence we are all victims. To understand this means to forgive, and as he himself puts it, "it would be strange not to forgive."

This is why Chekhov always finds some excuse or other for not condemning human beings. Even after

the gloomiest pictures of village life (in his *Peasants*), he has words of solace and justification. Olga, who leaves the village as a beggar, muses in the following manner upon her past: "Yes, to live with them was terrible; but yet they were human beings; they suffered and wept like human beings, and there was nothing in their lives for which one could not find excuse. Hard labour, that made the whole body ache at night, the cruel winters, the scanty harvests, the overcrowding; and they had no help and none to whom they could look for help. . . . And now she felt sorry for all these people, painfully so, and as she walked on she kept looking back at the huts."

VIII

While Maupassant abandoned himself to his gloom and frequently revelled in the virulence of his own indignant scorn, Chekhov preferred charity to indignation. In his very hopelessness there was a ray of hope. He was tormented less by the absolute *impasse* of life than by our impotence in finding an outlet from it. And so his characters are seekers, even in their resignation. Like Chekhov himself, they too are often strongly idealistic natures without ideals. They suffer not so much from the lack of will as from the lack of a worthy aim towards which their will could be directed. Instead of rejecting life, they reject only that miserable actuality which they loathe, and with which they cannot cope. They suspect that there is and must be some meaning in our suffering, but they have lost the key

to this meaning, and consequently to life itself. Whenever they open their eyes, the world seems to them a bad dream. The greater their intelligence, the weaker grows their interest in the surrounding reality. And, as Chekhov puts it in a letter (1890), "a great intelligence with little interest in life is like a great machine which produces nothing, yet requires a great deal of fuel and exhausts the owner."

Many of Chekhov's heroes are such wasted machines which produce nothing and therefore ruin their owners. A proof are the two characters in the *Tedious Story;* the tragedy of Uncle Vanya; or of his predecessor, Ivanov, who complains: "I am old at thirty. I have submitted myself to old age. With a heavy head and a sluggish mind, weary, used up, discouraged, without faith or love or an object in life, I wander like a shadow among other men, not knowing why I am alive or what it is that I want. Love seems to me to be a folly, caresses false. I see no sense in working or playing, and all passionate speeches seem insipid and tiresome. So I carry sadness with me wherever I go: a cold weariness or discontent, a horror of life. Yes, I am lost for ever and ever."

Chekhov's "lost" people are full of this irrational horror of life and of life's vulgarity, whose victims they become in the end, in spite of their protests. "Where am I, my God?" exclaims his young teacher of literature, who, but a few months earlier had married and been brimming with hope and happiness. "I am surrounded by vulgarity and vulgarity. Wearisome, insignificant people, pots of sour cream, jugs of milk,

cockroaches, stupid women. . . . There is nothing more terrible, mortifying, distressing than vulgarity. I must escape from here, I must escape to-day, or I shall go out of my mind." But Chekhov's heroes never escape. Vulgarity becomes, as it were, a transcendental agent behind life ; an agent making out of our existence a huge mouse-trap in which the awakened ones are anxiously running round and round, without ever getting further or breaking through the wall.

But how can one possibly accept life on such conditions? Chekhov neither accepted nor rejected it. His business was not to solve, but to state and to remain impartial. He dared to ignore even the progressive "ideas" of the time, for which negligence he was severely rebuked by N. K. Mikhailovsky—that Jupiter Tonans of positive Russian thought. Inner freedom was, in fact, so dear to Chekhov the artist that already by 1889 he wrote : "I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a believer in gradual progress, not a monk, not an indifferentist. I should like to be a free artist, and nothing more. . . . I regard trade-marks and labels as a superstition." And in 1892 he confessed again : "I am at least so far clever as not to conceal from myself my disease and not to deceive myself, and not to cover up my own emptiness with other people's rags, such as the ideas of the 'sixties and so on."

It was due to this painful inner freedom that Chekhov made one of the greatest efforts, since Pushkin, to liberate Russian prose from its moralising, social and didactic thraldom. At the same time he proved that

to be a sceptic of "ideas" does not necessarily mean to be indifferent to them, but only to be above them without ever becoming their slave, or their "high priest." In fact, as a man, Chekhov remained a seeker in the teeth of his scepticism. The simultaneous presence in him of the seeker and the sceptic may even help to explain several aspects of his art and character: his caution, for instance; his strong sense of relativity; his delicate reserve; his mistrust of dogmatic "truths," and his instinctive aversion to all cocksure criteria of good and evil, whether in morals, in philosophy, or in art. But, poised above the "yes" and the "no," he was still looking for something tenable in life. He became, for a time, even a mild disciple of Tolstoy, whose principles he gave up only towards 1894. It was in that year that he confessed to Suvorin: "Tolstoy's philosophy touched me profoundly and took possession of me for six or seven years, and what affected me was not its general propositions, with which I was familiar beforehand, but Tolstoy's manner of expressing it, his reasonableness, and probably a sort of hypnotism. Now, something in me protests. . . . It is not a matter of *pro* and *con;* the thing is that in one way or another Tolstoy has passed for me; he is not in my soul, and has departed from me, saying, 'I leave this your house empty.' I am untenanted. I am sick of theorising of all sorts, and such cads as Max Nordau I read with positive disgust."

This Tolstoyan influence can be traced in some of Chekhov's stories: in his *The Fit* (*Pripadok*), for example, which contrasts so strongly with Maupassant's *Maison*

Tellier. The hero of *My Life* is a thorough Tolstoyan; but *Ward No.* 6, and the less significant *Gooseberries*, are already records of Chekhov's emancipation from Tolstoyanism. Doctor Ragin, the principal character in the first story, is a tender but inefficient man who has withdrawn into his inner world and practises complete "non-resistance to evil," both in his private affairs and in the management of his hospital. As a result he becomes a pitiful victim of his own non-resistance. A more straightforward indictment of Tolstoyan passivity is the finale of the short sketch, *In Exile*. And in *Gooseberries*, Chekhov attacks quite openly Tolstoy's attitude towards civilisation, his one-sided "back-to-the-land" tendencies, and particularly his nihilistic Nirvana, which made him preach (in *How Much Land a Man Needs*) that all we require on this earth is six feet of ground—the size of a grave.

"It's the correct thing to say that a man needs no more than six feet of earth," argues Chekhov's hero. "But six feet is what a corpse needs, not a man. And they say, too, now that if our intellectual classes are attracted to the land and yearn for a farm, it's a good thing. But these farms are just the same thing as six feet of earth. To retreat from the town, from the struggle, from the bustle of life, to retreat and bury oneself in one's farm—it's not life, it's egoism, laziness, monasticism of a sort, but monasticism without good works. A man does not need six feet of earth or a farm, but the whole globe, all nature, where he can have room to display all the qualities and peculiarities of his free spirit."

Chekhov must have found unacceptable not only Tolstoy's narrow Puritanism, but even more his hatred of civilisation. For disappointed in everything, bored and irritated by the life of his days, he himself began to cling to a non-committal belief in the future of civilisation. Sometimes he almost seems to force himself to agree with those vague, half-Utopian formulæ which he voices through Trofimov in *The Cherry Orchard*, through Doctor Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*, or through Vershinin in *The Three Sisters*: "In two or three hundred years' time life will be unimaginably beautiful and wonderful. Mankind needs such a life, and if it is not ours to-day then we must look ahead for it, wait, think, prepare for it."

But is this vague Utopian hope an answer to the actual tragedy of the present life? What has present-day humanity done to be only a manure for the happiness of some future generation, which we shall never know? Chekhov realised the atrocity, the nsoluble injustice of such a "progress," or whatever we may call it. "Let the coming generations attain happiness; but they surely ought to ask themselves, for what did their ancestors live, and for what did they suffer?" he jotted down in his note-book, knowing that the past and present misery of humanity cannot be *morally* justified by the happiness of generations to come. Aware of this, Chekhov was honest enough to prefer downright defeat to any high-faluting "message." And so the baffled sceptic in him again and again took the upper hand over the emergency dealist. But even his greatest resignation vibrates

with idealistic pathos, together with what may be styled the very poetry of fatalism.

"What can we do?" Sonya asks, at the end of *Uncle Vanya*. "We must live our lives. Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and through the long evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials that fate imposes upon us; we shall work for others, without rest, both now and when we are old; and when our last hour comes, we shall meet it humbly, and there beyond the grave we shall say that we have suffered and wept, that our life was bitter, and God will have pity on us."

This is one answer. The other answer is the "victorious" upstart Lopakhin (in *The Cherry Orchard*), whose enterprising hand seems to destroy the beauty of everything he touches, and who sets out to conquer life by means of his purse—to make it uglier. These are the two polar blind-alleys of Chekhov's world. And it is difficult to say which of them contains the greater defeat.

IX

Chekhov's wavering between his idealistic nature and his scepticism contrasts strangely with the ruthless negation of Maupassant. An incurable pessimist on the one hand, and a sensuous Epicurean on the other, Maupassant looks upon the world as a stage which, being both disgusting and amusing, provides at least plenty of raw material for his writings. Who does not know and admire the polish of those writings, which often are

as clear and also as cold as a crystal? But if we dive beneath the surface of his work, we can perhaps find out what his coldness must have cost him. He needed a great deal of forced indifference, of cynical irony and self-assertive spirit in order to conceal the secret that he, too, had a warm heart, and a soul whose wings had been clipped before its very first flight. He confesses—though rarely—in his more intimate works and letters, how much he had suffered from life, and how misleading his cold exterior often was. Here are a few passages from a letter to P. Neveux:

"Thinking becomes an abominable torture, when the whole of my brain is nothing but one wound. There is so much pain (*tant de meurtrissure*) in my head that every stir of my ideas makes me want to cry. Why? Why? Dumas would say that I have a bad stomach. I, on the contrary, believe that I have a heart which is both proud and shy (*honteux*): a human heart, the ancient human heart at which one may laugh, but which all the same gets stirred and makes us suffer. Intellectually, too, I have a Latin soul which is much battered. And then, there are days when I do not think and nevertheless suffer, because I am of the sensitive ones (*car je suis de la famille des écorchés*). But as for this, I never tell nor show it; I even believe that I manage splendidly to conceal it. I am sure other people think I am one of the coldest men on earth. But I am only a sceptic, which is not the same; I am a sceptic because my sight is clear. And my eyes say to my heart: 'Hide yourself, old friend, you are ridiculous!' And it hides itself."

If Chekhov still remained a tragic seeker in spite of all, Maupassant never went beyond the pale of the tragic questioner, who knows beforehand that it would be naïve to expect an answer. For the stupid farce of life will never change. Reformers may come and go, humanity will all the same " continue to live borne down by the old and odious customs, the criminal prejudices, the ferocious ideas of our barbarous forefathers; for we are but animals, and we shall remain animals led by our instinct, so that nothing will ever change."

Such a view cannot be inspiring. And woe to those who have been compelled by it to give up their higher aims, their higher self-realisation! Never again will they be at home in this world. Even when they try to forget themselves in its pleasures, they will not go beyond a morbid and impotent " will to pleasure." The restless wanderer and sensualist, Maupassant, knew something about that. Besides, how could he enjoy life since he did not love anything, not even his own art? " As for me, I am incapable of really loving my art," he says in a letter; " I feel how relative is the value of ideas, of words, of the strongest intelligence. I cannot help despising thought because of its weakness, and form because of its insufficiency. Indeed, I have a strong and incurable notion of human impotence, and I despise all effort because it never carries me beyond miserable approximations (*qu'à de pauvres à peu près*)."

Other avowals of the sort can be found in his books and letters. Yet his old " human heart " continued to question, to wonder. Step by step, his vision endea-

voured to pierce the surface of reality and to get into deeper regions of the human soul. At times he managed to reach its more intimate recesses, and it was then that a more intimate ring came into his tone as well. We see this in some of his novels, certain pages of which almost remind one of Chekhov. *Une vie*, *Pierre et Jean*, *Fort comme la mort*, *Notre cœur*, show not only Maupassant's strong psychological vein, but also a fair degree of veiled compassion for his own characters. Or take his pathetic story, *La rempailleuse* (*The Chair-Mender*), in which there is as much human pity as in Chekhov's wonderful *Darling*, although in Maupassant even pity becomes aggressive and somewhat spiteful.

His later introspective period was almost bound to lead him from the riddle of the human soul to the riddle of the universe. Although a materialist at heart, Maupassant became more and more haunted by the irrational side of life. Partly owing to his disease—he began to suffer quite early, at the age of thirty-three, from hallucinations, from division of personality, and also from terrible symbolic dreams and delusions which brought his imagination into contact, as it were, with a new and mysterious dimension. The consumptive Chekhov had some " pathologic " glimpses of a similar kind, which he recorded in his *Black Monk*. But what a difference between the unearthly exaltations of Chekhov's consumptive visionary and the unfathomable terror of *Le Horla*, of *Lui*, and others, a terror which becomes even stronger by virtue of the lucid concreteness of Maupassant's style and language.

It was his psychological introspection on the one hand, and his disease on the other, that gradually brought Maupassant nearer to the Unknown and fostered his interest in the irrational aspects of existence. It was at this stage that he began to crave also for a deeper, more universal, more spiritual art. "When one has read four of the most talented, of the most ingenuous authors," he says in his *Sur l'eau*, "it is idle to open another. And nothing more can be learned. They also, these men, can but imitate men. They exhaust themselves in sterile labour. . . . Of what use is it to me to learn what I am, to read what I think, to see myself portrayed in the trivial adventures of a novel? Ah, if poets could vanquish space, explore the planets, discover other worlds, other beings; vary unceasingly for my mind the nature and form of things; convey me constantly through a changeful and surprising Unknown; open for me mysterious gates in unexpected and marvellous horizons—I would read them night and day. But they, impotent as they are, can but change the place of a word, and show me my own image, as the painters do. Of what use is all this?"

An even more surprising thing was that Maupassant began to show a certain interest in the profounder aspects of religion, as may be proved by the drafts for his unfinished novel, *L'Angélus*.[1] Many remarks about religion and Christ, made in it by the Abbé de Marveaux, breathe not only quite an unexpected depth, but also an unexpected sincerity. Yet Maupassant did no

[1] Published in *La Revue de Paris*, 1895.

further probing in this direction. Haunted by his disease, by his fits of melancholy, by the growing mystery of life, by various spectres and delusions, he finally went mad, and died in 1893 from *dementia paralytica*.

X

Both Chekhov and Maupassant feel the essence of the short story in a new and original manner. They may have shown great talent in other literary *genres* as well; yet there too they remain short-story writers with regard to technique: Maupassant's novels and Chekhov's long narratives, as well as plays, reflect the same "atomised" vision as their stories. Their art is perhaps the most perfect expression of such a vision, being at the same time the most convincing shorthand treatment of reality. They always know how to convey a maximum of content by a minimum of means. A few dexterous touches of their pen express more than entire chapters of voluble description on the part of more "thorough" writers.

Yet, there is a difference in some of the technical means, as well as in the "texture" of their art. Maupassant is more graphic; Chekhov, again, is musical and pictorial—with delicate, almost pastel-like touches; this is why he is stronger in moods and situations than in characters. Some of Maupassant's miniatures remind one of fine etchings, or of *croquis*, in which there is nothing "emotional." As one of his critics aptly observed, Maupassant knows how to provoke emotions in the reader precisely by suppressing them in his

stories. Clear, logical and vigorous sketches of concrete facts—this was one of his chief ambitions. Chekhov, on the other hand, seems to make use of facts not so much for their own sake as for the sake of that *atmosphere* which he wants to produce. He is like a magic mirror, in which all the dissociated patches of reality are strangely blurred, and yet impressive by their very vagueness.

In spite of his individual manner, Maupassant still adheres—in many respects—to the classical tradition of the French story-tellers, to his teacher Flaubert, and to Mérimée. Like these two, he is a deliberate and self-conscious craftsman. His ease is not the ease of an improviser, but that of a man who has fully conquered his material by hard work and hard practice—according to the maxim that talent is only long patience. "Whatever the thing we wish to say, there is but one word to express it, but one verb to give it movement, but one adjective to qualify it," he says. "We must seek till we find this noun, this verb and this adjective, and never be content with getting very near it, never allow ourselves to play tricks, even happy ones, or have recourse to sleight of language to avoid a difficulty." Maupassant's artistic economy thus replaces the quantity of words by their quality. And he always knows how to veil the deliberateness of his manner, as well as his thoroughly calculated *pointe*, in an elegant surface spontaneity.

Chekhov is in this respect less deliberate and often less perfect in form than Maupassant. His ease is chiefly one of happy improvisation: the ease of a man

who, instead of directing his intuition is himself led by it. Besides, Chekhov did not conceal this either from himself or from others. To Grigorovich, for example, he wrote (in 1886): "Hitherto my attitude towards literary work has been frivolous, heedless, casual. I don't remember a *single* story over which I have spent more than 24 hours. I wrote my stories as reporters write their notes about fires, mechanically, half-unconsciously, taking no thought of the reader or of myself." And to Suvorin two years later: "Medicine is my lawful wife, and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one, I spend the night with the other. Though it's disorderly, it's not so dull, and besides neither of them loses anything from my infidelity." It was only with a certain reluctance that Chekhov gave up his "lawful wife" and began to take his "mistress" seriously. But even after that, he seemed to rely more on spontaneity than on disciplined craft. The art of Chekhov is also less intellectual than that of Maupassant. His touch is more lyrical, and his clairvoyance is due not so much to observation as to his sympathetic inner contact, to his intimacy with people and things. He mistrusts clever rationalising and clever labels. This is what one of his characters says on the subject (in *The Wife*): "I listened to the doctor and, according to my habit, applied my usual measures to him—materialist, idealist, money-grubber, herd-instinct, and so forth, but not a single one of my measures would fit even approximately; and, curiously, while I only listened to him, and looked at him, he was a man perfectly clear to me, but the moment I began

applying my measures to him he became, despite all his sincerity and simplicity, an extraordinarily complex, confused and inexplicable nature."

This intuitive perception made Chekhov devise a method of intuitive rendering by means of the so-called *atmosphere*, which he created in various ways: by original phrasing, unusual comparisons and metaphors; by mixing tragedy with farce; by interlacing apparently incongruous trifles, contrasts and disharmonies; by casual hints, shades, pauses; by his tone or his invisible smile; by saturating the most trivial remarks from everyday life with a profound and tragic content "between the lines"; by the abruptness, even confusion in the dialogue of his characters; and by other technical secrets as well.

The Chekhovian "atmosphere" reaches its highest pitch in his plays. Like his stories, his plays, too, have no plot in the old sense. In this respect he goes much further than Ibsen. Instead of unfolding a cleverly constructed plot, Chekhov develops a tragic atmosphere out of the casual fragments of ordinary "atomised" life. One could almost say that he dramatises the atmosphere which in his hands grows and grows until it finally explodes. To this development he subjects all: the setting, the action and the dialogue; or better—the double dialogue—a medium which Chekhov probably took from Ibsen and brought to a great perfection. Behind the trivial external conversation of his characters is their unspoken *inner dialogue*, and failing to perceive it in such plays as *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, or

The Cherry Orchard, we lose the key to their most powerful passages. But once we have got hold of the key, the apparently scrappy words and scenes become strangely unified and they flood our minds with a sadness which is both thrilling and unbearable: unbearable because of its curious intensity, and thrilling because it expands like a mysterious bridge leading one to the eternal drama of all humanity, of all life. The gentle and passive melancholy of Chekhov is stronger in this respect than the masculine vigour of Maupassant's art. It is stronger because it is saturated with that Charity which true Art shares with true Religion.

X

DOSTOEVSKY AND PROUST

I

THERE is only one excuse for confronting Marcel Proust with Fyodor Dostoevsky: that of contrast. The features they have in common are indeed so few that they can be summed up in two or three lines. Both are unparalleled masters of the psychological novel; both operated largely in the region of the "subconscious" which they annexed—on a big scale—to modern literature; and although endowed with a strong appetite for life, they were both partial invalids: Dostoevsky suffered from epilepsy, and Proust was a victim of incurable asthma. But if disease is a disadvantage in practical life, it may be at times the reverse in artistic creation. It may heighten our sensibility, give us an original angle from which to look upon the world, and thus provide an inquisitive mind with new grounds for creative exploration. It may, moreover, increase the very intensity of one's art—as a compensation for the intensity of actual life from which one is more or less excluded.

Proust and Dostoevsky certainly owed much of their unusual sensibility, as well as the character of their writings, to their precarious health, which fostered in

them their capacity for observation, and particularly their uncanny psychological sense. A reader of their works may return to his usual occupations, yet his perception of reality will be uncomfortably enlarged and deepened. He will know so much more about man and life that in the end he may get frightened of his new knowledge. Otherwise, these two writers deal with different themes, in a different manner, on different planes, and also with widely different social atmospheres. Is it possible to imagine a greater social contrast than that between the world of Proust's bulky *Quest of the Past* (*A la recherche du temps perdu*) and that of Dostoevsky's novels and stories?

Proust moves in exclusive "Society"—in the highest French aristocracy at a period (1875–1919) when this was still asserting itself against the enriched bourgeoisie all the more proudly the more it foreboded that soon it would have to condescend to them, mix with them and even marry their daughters. The ancient family of the Guermantes is the centre of this impressive and yet sterile world with its subtle divisions and subdivisions, its pedantic etiquette, its obligatory shams, its own peculiar values of good and evil, and its hothouse cult of pedigree at the expense of everything else. The other region which Proust knows equally well is that of the rich bourgeoisie represented by the couple Verdurin, whose only ambition in life is to resemble the "great ones." The rest of Proust's characters consist either of the intermediaries between these two social groups (the refined dilettante Swann, for instance), or of their nges and camp-followers. The final picture is a

motley gallery of "rakes," sybarites, sexual perverts, artists, gossips, cocottes, savants, social climbers and various representatives of the profligate *jeunesse dorée*. The whole of Proust's novel—for his entire work is only one single novel in sixteen volumes—looks on the surface casually constructed, but in essence it is like a huge, diluted symphony with a web of motives which are interwoven and converging towards the two central themes. One of them is Guermantes-Verdurin, which forms the social scaffolding of the novel; and the other is Proust's love for Albertine, upon which is concentrated the finest psychological vivisection of the writer.

The atmosphere in which Proust's two social castes are soaked is that of snobbery in excelsis. His aristocrats indulge in it as in a kind of art for art's sake; but they often use it also as a weapon against the impudence of the climbing upstart; while the ambitious nether regions—those of the Verdurins—need it as a continuous assertion of their own significance. In the first case it looks stuffy and superannuated in spite of its "style"; in the second it becomes as vulgar as it is pretentious. Proust, who was himself a rich bourgeois by birth, extracted out of snobbery—not without much irony—its very core. He managed to catch its most hidden aspects, shades and colours, even its eternal quintessence. He is in a way its Homer, and this in itself is a valuable addition to modern letters.

In the course of the novel we see at first the antagonism and later the gradual process of fusion between the two castes: the decaying aristocracy and the enriched

bourgeoisie. Thus Gilberte, the daughter of Swann and of a former cocotte, marries a real Guermantes, Robert de Saint-Loup. By an ironical decree of fate even the vulgar Mme. Verdurin becomes, after her husband's death, the wife of a ruined Prince de Guermantes, and plays in Paris, during and after the Great War, an important social rôle. In the last volume, *Time Recovered* (*Le temps retrouvé*) the exclusive faubourg Saint-Germain is already invaded by questionable newcomers who "deprive it of all its homogeneity, style and colour." It is the post-war atmosphere which begins to assert itself in order to change that hothouse world beyond recognition.

II

If the rich and leisurely Proust introduces himself to the reader in the aura of snobbery as it were, the literary proletarian, Dostoevsky, bears the stamp of the "underworld" both social and psychological. At times it seems as if his lungs were not adapted to healthy air at all; as if he were compelled to create his own pathologic surroundings in order to be able to breathe. At his very début (*Poor Folk*, and *The Double*), he dealt with extreme social misery on the one hand, and with pathology on the other. His subsequent work only widened and deepened these two elements, enlarging them almost into an encyclopædia of misery and madness. The squalid life of social outcasts, of impoverished officials, criminals, starving students, prostitutes, and other "insulted and injured"—this is the world in

which Dostoevsky moves freely, and in which his psychological intuition never flags. The emanations of this world—all the dissociated Golyadkins, the possessed maniacs, metaphysical madmen, epileptic saints and sinners—are his most *real* figures, although they are much too intense to be realistic.

In contrast with Proust, Dostoevsky is not successful in depicting the upper classes. Besides, he deals with them only in so far as they are in contact with the "insulted and the injured," or he takes them up as abnormal dwellers of the psychological and spiritual underworld, in which case their social background becomes irrelevant. Those unforgettable pictures of the Russian *byt* which we find in Turgenev and Tolstoy are absent from Dostoevsky's work. He either chooses its most exceptional, that is, pathologic aspects, or its chaotic flux, its process of dissolution. The social background in *The Possessed*, *The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and even in *The Raw Youth* is not realistic in the proper sense, but purposely arranged in such a way as to intensify his hauntingly lit-up portraits.

If in Proust even abnormal perverts are treated on the plane of ordinary normal beings, Dostoevsky simply ignores normality as such. His tormented spirit revels in all that is extraordinary, in distortions, in exaggerations. As if driven on by a continuous urge towards stronger and stronger inner experiences, he conjures up characters and conflicts which are all the time on the verge of hallucination, or of nightmare. Yet his very exaggerations are valuable in so far as they are the

result of his profound intuition and not of a self-sufficient surface imagination.

The apparent realism of Dostoevsky, like that of his teacher Gogol, is entirely subjective. First he dissociates reality, and out of the dissociated elements he creates a new reality of his own, and according to his own inner needs. For, haunted as he was by his spiritual chaos, he could relieve it only by projecting it outside himself. Hence the weird choice of his plots and characters. His art thus became a wrestle with his morbidly complicated inner self, which he *had* to explore in order to be able to cope with it. He did not shrink in this proceeding from most violent experiments upon his own soul, not even from self-inflicted pains and tortures.

What is known as Dostoevsky's " cruel talent " has several deep and complicated roots. One of the questions at issue is this : can pain and torment be a way of knowledge, of self-knowledge ? Dostoevsky (like his partial disciple Nietzsche) answered in the affirmative. He tormented himself, as well as his heroes, because the ultimate depths of suffering revealed to him the ultimate and most elusive depths of the human soul. Believing that the true essence of man comes out best of all in his exceptional states, he was interested chiefly in those crises of human consciousness which to normal healthy minds appear impossible and absurd. This is why the exceptionally great art of Dostoevsky can be understood and appreciated only if taken on its own exceptional plane.

III

While the psychology of Dostoevsky's characters is, in a way, beyond normality and abnormality, Proust is more at home on that ground which could perhaps be called—*before* the normal and the abnormal. In both regions there is an interesting fusion (as well as confusion) of man's conscious and unconscious elements—a flux in which "good" and "evil" are often indiscriminately mixed up; in which the greatest contrasts exist side by side. This elusive boundary-line between conscious and unconscious has been crossed by both Dostoevsky and Proust; but as each of them goes in a different direction, the result of their excursions is bound to be different, too. Dostoevsky's psychology is above all a spiritual quest, and also a struggle with the monsters of his own "subconscious" which threaten to destroy his mind. Hence his divings—a smoking torch in his hand—into those labyrinths of the human spirit which are full of abysses and of weird apocalyptic beasts with a cruel lustre in their eyes.

The ground of Proust's art is safer. Whereas Dostoevsky looks for new spiritual continents, Proust confines himself either to the fringes of average sensations and emotions which he investigates down to their ultimate "atomic" elements hidden in our subconscious; or he gives endless descriptions of sexual inversions which he treats in an entirely dispassionate way. In both cases he is acute and original. He shows that even those feelings which seem simple on the surface can be extremely complicated underneath. Take

Proust's analysis of Swann's love for Odette, or that of his own love for Albertine. There is no more detailed and finer dissection of love in modern literature. *Adolphe* by Benjamin Constant, and even Stendhal's analytical intuitions look almost bald in comparison with Proust's sharp and patient eye, which catches every change, every shade, and disentangles even the most confused subconscious roots of our psychic states.

In this process he invariably preserves a scientific calm coupled with complete objectivity and integrity of statement. While Dostoevsky often gives the impression of a spiritual Sisyphus who vainly tries to alleviate his burden by unravelling its mystery, Proust is an anatomist of psychological "infinitesimals." He never raises his voice, never forgets himself, and what he sees or guesses, he renders in a sure although in a too explicit way. Entirely devoid of Dostoevsky's fury and frenzy, he is the very embodiment of the cold intellectual observer, who seems to be more interested in the analysis of feelings than in the feelings themselves. If Dostoevsky puts irrational intuition above logical reason, Proust tries to comprehend intellectually even the irrational chaos of our subconscious *ego*. Yet he is not averse to considering Dostoevsky's standpoint, as we see from his conversation with Albertine (in *La Prisonnière*).

"Dostoevsky," he says, amongst others, "instead of presenting things in the logical order, that is to say, beginning with the cause, shows us first of all the effect, the illusion which strikes us. . . . Undoubtedly, like everyone else, he knew sin, in one form or another, and

probably in a form forbidden by law. In this respect he must have been somewhat of a criminal like his heroes. . . . I admit that in Dostoevsky this preoccupation with murder has something unusual about it, and this makes him very strange to me. . . . In Dostoevsky I find depths extremely profound, but in some ways apart from the actual soul. Yet he is a great creative genius. To begin with, the world he paints really seems to have been created by him. All those buffoons who are recurring again and again—his Lebedevs, Karamazovs, Ivolgins—all that incredible procession is a humanity more fantastic than that which peoples Rembrandt's *Night's Watch*. And perhaps it is fantastic in the same way, that is, owing to the lighting and the costume, while at the bottom it happens to be quite ordinary. In any case it is saturated with pro- ound and exceptional truths, peculiar to Dostoevsky alone."

IV

Proust's psychology is, however, only one side of his work. His other—and equally brilliant—side is his portrayal of manners : of French *high-life* in Paris, in the provinces and in fashionable seaside places (Balbec). His pageant of remarkably caught portraits, dinner parties, receptions, society gossips and society perverts makes his work belong as much to the history of manners as to literature. Thus Proust works simultaneously in two regions : on the one hand he describes the social life of the caste he knows, and on the other he burrows into the most elusive inner processes of his characters. These

processes he records with painstaking minuteness, interspersing his pages at the same time with remarks about life, music, painting, women, dreams, inversions, and even about old local names.

Dostoevsky catches his own revelations by surprise, as it were, while they are still seething. He gives the impression of being more clairvoyant than observant, while Proust strikes one as a most observant and also most inquisitive connoisseur. One is not surprised to hear that he used to inquire after the details of his friends' lives, even from the waiters, like a professional gossip ; or that he took part in a courtesan's orgies—as an onlooker. Yet his realism is due as much to introspection as to observation. He describes things not by noting down his immediate perceptions, but by rediscovering them after they had been stored up in his subconscious memory for years. His entire work—except the beautiful section, " Swann in Love,"—is a string of autobiographic reminiscences on the part of an invalid who has surrendered to the spell of his past, or of his *temps perdu* (as he calls it), like a day-dreamer. Carried on by the flux of his " involuntary memory," he resuscitates everyone and everything he remembers, including his own past self, or selves, whose layers he puts asunder with the skill and the minuteness a watchmaker would apply to a watch. How minute and how fine is the picture of his transition from boyhood into adolescence ; the anatomy of his first and subsequent loves ; and the vision with which he scrutinises every character emerging from his past, even from that of his earliest years. Proust's work is in

many respects a magnificent piece of day-dreaming dissected by the dreamer himself.

We find an enlightening passage about this in a letter he wrote concerning the first volume of his *Du coté de chez Swann*. " This is an extremely genuine book," he says, " but constructed in order to imitate more or less the involuntary memory ; owing to sudden reminiscences one part of this book is a portion of my life which came to me in a flash as I was eating a piece of cake dipped in tea, a cake which delighted me before I identified it by remembering that once I used to take it every morning ; thus my past immediately re-awakened, and, as I describe it in the book, it did so in the manner of that Japanese game in which little pieces of paper soaked in a bowl of water turn into people, flowers, etc. . . . all the people and scenery of that period of my life came out of a cup of tea. Another part of the book revives those moments of waking when one does not know where one is, and imagines oneself two years younger and in another country. But this is only the scaffolding of the book."

In an interview he gave to the representative of *Le Temps*, in November, 1913, Proust was even more explicit when declaring : " It is not only that the same persons will appear again and again in this book, under different aspects, as in some of Balzac's novels, but also certain profound, almost unconscious processes will recur in one and the same person. In this respect my book might be looked upon as an attempt at a series of ' novels about the Unconscious,' I should not be ashamed to say ' Bergsonian novels ' if I were quite sure

about it. . . . But this would not be true, because my work is governed by the distinction between the involuntary and the voluntary memory, a distinction which is not only absent from Bergson's philosophy, but is even contradicted by it (*sic !*).

" It is after all only from the involuntary reminiscences that the artist should gather the principal material for his work. First and foremost, because they are involuntary ; as they form themselves, aroused by the similarity of an identical moment, they alone have a hold upon authenticity. Then in the things they bring back to us there is an exact proportion between what we do and what we do not remember. And last, as they make us enjoy the sensation in totally different circumstances, they liberate it from all irrelevancy and give us its timeless essence."

V

The last two lines of the quoted passage may easily raise the question whether Proust's *recherche* had not been prompted by some metaphysical urge or other. The answer is in the affirmative, but only in so far as he was anxious to glean, at the bottom of our senses, those " supra-sensual " truths about life which escape our everyday consciousness or come to it only in rare flashes. His two posthumous volumes (*Le temps retrouvé*) which give the key to Proust's entire work, certainly throw much light upon his metaphysical interests, and also upon his conception of time—a conception akin to Bergson's idea of Duration.

This is how he describes, in his last volume, the sudden intoxication he felt after having struck upon the idea of writing his great work : " The happiness I felt did not come from that purely subjective nerve-tension which cuts us off from the past, but on the contrary from the broadening of mind, in which the past was being recreated and taking shape, giving me (though, alas ! only by moments) a sense of eternal values. That sense I should like to bequeath to those whom I could enrich with my treasure." And again : " If only I had time enough left to finish my work, I should not fail to stamp it with the seal of that Time whose force I felt so strongly. I should describe men by it, even though it made them seem like monsters occupying a much more considerable place in Time than the one they occupy in space—a place immeasurably prolonged, since at the same time, like giants immersed in the flux of years, they come into contact with distant epochs lived by them in Time."

Also some of his theories about art, particularly his beautiful passages about music, have a strong metaphysical flavour. But apart from these instances, Proust gives the impression of an inveterate sceptic, pessimist and sensualist. He can be, and is, supra-sensitive, but only on a psycho-biological plane. His proper region is that limbo-world where our conscious psychic states disintegrate into their sub-conscious " atoms." And here he is unrivalled not only among modern writers, but also among modern psychologists.

In some respects Proust combines Bergson with

Freud. While his conception of time and memory shows the influence of Bergson, his analysis of our subconscious states is often akin to that of Freud, only it is more subtle. Independently of Freud and other psychoanalysts, Proust pays great attention to dreams, to sleep and to those moments in which our conscious and unconscious selves mingle in an obvious way—the moments of waking up, for instance. Like Freud, he dissects the so-called *libido* with a sure hand, and reduces it—with the same one-sidedness—chiefly to the polygamous sexual appetite. And in the analysis of this appetite (whether normal or abnormal) Proust has no equal. His favourite heroes are either sentimental sensualists like Swann, the young Robert and Proust himself, or sexual inverts like Baron de Charlus, Albertine and a long gallery of other characters.

It is only fair to say that although gloating at times over such dangerous themes, Proust treats them with great tact and with great objectivity. Calmly he shows us the complex clockwork of sensuality at its worst and at its best, but preferably at its worst. He lays bare all the secret springs of voluptuousness, of jealousy, of the most elusive physical attractions, yet here it ends. In confusing love with vice and dissipation on the one hand, and in reducing it to its physiological " atoms " on the other, Proust was bound to overlook that deeper essence of love which is above and beyond its process of atomisation. The love of his characters never goes beyond the appetite of refined polygamists, sensualists and perverts. They can only be " in love " from sexual attraction, from weakness, from wounded

pride—and they are always at the mercy of their own contradictory impulses, always on the verge of hatred and of a passionate desire to escape from the chains which they yet enjoy all the more, the more they suffer from them.

And Proust's women! Most of them are empty society cocottes whose chief weapons are lies and dissimulation. While Dostoevsky's portraits of women in love are indefinably mysterious, the women of Proust are only mystifying. It is enough to compare Aglaya, Nastasya Philipovna, Sonya, Grushenka, with Odette, Albertine, Andrée, Oriane and others to see the contrast. That is the sort of women his men are infatuated with. And even when they realise their intrigues, their worthlessness, their lies and deceits, they still cling to them and remain, in their passion, often as helpless as children. "To think that I have wasted years of my life," says Swann, "that I have longed for death, that the greatest love I have ever known was for a woman who did not please me, who was not my style."[1]) Dostoevsky managed to raise, to spiritualise his own chaotic sensuality (which, by the way, must have been much stronger than that of Proust); Proust on the other hand only intellectualised it, and therefore remained—in this respect—upon a ground which is complicated without being tragic. The self-division of Dostoevsky's main heroes on the plane of love and sex is a spiritual tragedy, a fight between the elemental

[1] Quotations from *Swann's Way, Within the Budding Grove* and *Guermantes' Way* are taken from the excellent translation by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff.

forces of " good " and " evil " ; while the dissociations of Proust's characters provide, above all, a fine sporting ground for the most observant psychological vivisector of recent times.

VI

This difference may perhaps explain also the widely different notions of human personality on the part of both authors. Dostoevsky is all for a dynamic and at the same time transcendental conception of the human self. He wants to reach its permanent kernel beyond the line of its inner division. He is not willing to accept anything less than its absolute, its cosmic significance. Proust however takes the human self only in its psycho-biological flux and confusion. Here once more Proust comes close to Bergson in so far as he shows the ceaseless changeability of the human self. The latter becomes in his hands only a " collection of moments," a " *superposition de nos états successifs*," a sum total of influences and of reactions to various circumstances. When these are changed, the human being, too, is bound to change. Its growth is a continuous metamorphosis conditioned partly from within and partly from without. His Swann, for example, is one person in *Du coté de chez Swann* where he is in love with Odette, and quite a different character in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles*, where he is introduced to us as Odette's husband. He is different again in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, where he is ill and gradually drifting to death. Analogous changes we see in Odette herself, in Albertine, in Dr. Cottard, in Robert and in many other figures.

" The good and bad qualities which a person presents to us," says Proust, " exposed to view on the surface of his or her face, rearrange themselves in a totally different order if we approach them from another angle—just as, in a town, buildings that appear strung irregularly along a single line, from another aspect retire into a graduated distance, and their relative heights are altered . . . Thus it can only be after one has recognised, not without having had to feel one's way, the optical illusions of one's first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be possible. But it is not; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes in himself; we think that we have caught him, he moves, and when we imagine that at last we have seen him clearly it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in making clearer, when they no longer represent him." (*A l'Ombre*, II).

This quotation can be completed by another passage taken from his last book. " It would be impossible to give an account of our relations with anyone," he says, " whom we have only known slightly, without passing in review the most diverse situations in our life. Thus to me each individual—and I was myself one of these individuals—represented the duration of time by the revolution he had made not only around himself but around others; and especially by the positions he had taken up one after the other in regard to me."

Aware of the " atomisation " which is taking place in

modern consciousness, Proust becomes in essence a relativist of human personality. The deeper he merges into the human *ego* the more ambivalent and contradictory begin to seem all its component parts. But is there anything behind them, anything which combines the flux of these single states into one personality? How is it that after sleep, for instance, we nevertheless continue our own self, and not that of another person? Proust finds an emergency answer in his conception of memory. Memory alone combines our "selves" of different periods and conditions in one single character, and saves him from dispersion. On one occasion he even says that "the resurrection of the soul after death could perhaps be conceived as a phenomenon of memory."

Proust's vision concentrates not so much upon characters as upon their single psychic states and processes. He *composes* his heroes from a quantity of such states and features. Taking us round and round, he shows them from all angles without forgetting to analyse their minutest changes and reactions in every new circumstance. His figures thus abound in small impressionist touches at the expense of concrete outline. Yet the paradox of Proust's art is that his intensely "objective" treatment of characters and events is due, first of all, to his intense introspection by means of which he evokes all the impressions of his own past, introducing them into the present as carefully as if he were actually watching them during the process of analysis. He investigates and notes down each separate moment of his transposed past just as his memory brings it to him;

and it is not his fault that the portraits which he shows to us with the minuteness of a naturalist are as elusive and changeable as they were when he knew them. The fact that there are few simple figures—figures made of one piece—in his work, is a proof of his artistic honesty rather than of his inability to create them.

VII

While Proust was a "relativist" of human personality, Dostoevsky wanted to be its absolutist at any cost. Hence his postulates of God and of personal immortality. Hence also his impulse to explore the self-divided human consciousness to the very end in order to make—in spite of it and through it—a desperate dash towards a transcendental synthesis and unity of man. He was all the more anxious to do this, because like his Ivan Karamazov, he himself could neither believe to the end, nor was he strong enough to become a complete unbeliever.

As a "modern," Dostoevsky could not help being a sceptic, for these two things are almost synonymous. Already in 1862 he acknowledged in a letter to Strahov that in his largely autobiographic *Gambler* he intended to portray "a typical Russian abroad: a Russian who has lost his belief, and dares not be an unbeliever." This "typical Russian" was, of course, Dostoevsky himself. Had he been a believer he would not torture himself all his life with the problem of God, as well as with those ultimate issues of existence which depend on the solution of that problem. But as he was too weak

to face complete scepticism, he was compelled—by that very fact—to become strong enough to fight it. His spiritual weakness thus became the direct cause of his spiritual daring and adventures. He took up the most difficult metaphysical problems not in order to examine them in the light of " science and reason," but in order to turn them into great irrational passions. Owing to his lack of restraint, and partly to his incapacity to resist any dangerous temptation (whether spiritual or emotional), he often rushed into the most incredible inner experiments which he then had to unravel simply in order not to be crushed by them. As his " psychology " was his most efficient and frequently his only weapon, it was natural that he should perfect this weapon to an unheard-of degree.

Unable, or unwilling, to believe in the competence of a rational solution of his torments, he laid all the more stress upon various irrational elements of human consciousness in which he often revelled like a spiritual voluptuary. Yet the demon of doubt was there all the time. This demon was at least as strong in him as his passionate will to believe in God and in—man. He could not accept life and humanity without God, that is, without a " higher idea " and a higher, cosmic meaning, because in a purely biological humanity he saw nothing but civilised zoology. On the other hand, his uncanny psychological clairvoyance only fostered his disgust with actual mankind. He knew too much about the real man to be able to respect and love him. The very volubility with which he speaks of " brotherly love " is somewhat suspicious. How naïve

are, in fact, all the phrases about Dostoevsky's love of mankind! He never loved and never could love mankind which he knew. One of his chief features is not love, but that endless and tragic spite of humanity to which he gave vent in the "Grand Inquisitor" and perhaps even more in his terrifying fragment "Bobok." He talks so much of love because he would like to love and cannot. One can love what one respects; but what one despises one can only pity. And Dostoevsky's pity was as great as his hidden disgust. At last he himself mistook his great pity for great Christian love and indulged in it almost to perversion. His very cruelty towards his own heroes was probably dictated by this urge towards pity. For the more he mangled their fates and their lives, the more opportunity he had for pitying them, for shedding tears over their lot as he did—according to his own confession—already when he was creating his first example of the "insulted and injured," Makar Devushkin (*Poor Folk*).

In the same way as he tortured his characters from an urge towards pity, he often lacerated his soul—from a need of repentance and of ecstatic disgust with himself. He committed sins not so much because he enjoyed them, but partly from weakness of character, and partly in order to revel in the intensity of his own repentance after the sin: a motive which to certain temperaments may be infinitely more tempting than the sin itself. Yet in spite of their dangers, Dostoevsky welcomed such inner states, because their irrational frenzy always provided a temporary refuge from his doubts and inquiries. But since his logic and reason could not in

the long run be suppressed, the result was a growing split in Dostoevsky's consciousness: that very split from which Ivan Karamazov went mad, and from which he himself tried to escape by clutching unconditionally at Christ and at Russian Orthodoxy.[1] It is not belief, but only a sincere *will to believe,* that we find at the bottom of Dostoevsky's religion.

VIII

Unlike Dostoevsky, Proust is indifferent to religion and to the problems connected with it. If Dostoevsky is a tragic seeker for God who wants to find out the final meaning of man and life, Proust is only an invalid Epicurean, contemplating his own *temps perdu* as his last shelter. He surrendered to it, not in order to lacerate himself by eternal problems, but in order to enjoy his own reminiscences, since he could no longer take part in living life. One might apply to him the words in which the sick Swann talks of his own past years (*Sodome et Gomorrhe,* II): "What I wish to say is that I have loved life, that I have loved art much. Well, now that I am somewhat too tired to live with others, these old personal sentiments of mine seem to me as precious as to a passionate collector. I open my heart to myself like a shop window."

The whole of Proust's work is an ingenuous and perhaps too crowded "shop window" of this kind. He gathered and cherished in it innumerable trifles like a

[1] A more thorough analysis of Dostoevsky's inner drama can be found in my book, *Dostoevsky and his Creation* (Collins).

man who wants to forget himself in the contemplation of his old sentiments and impressions. Yet this occupation was probably accompanied by a second and equally important tendency—the legitimate tendency of an invalid to analyse away the whole of reality in order to prove to himself that the actual life, which is no longer accessible to him, is not worth while. "And it is, after all, as good a way as any of solving the problem of existence to approach near enough to the things that have appeared to us from a distance to be beautiful and mysterious, to be able to satisfy ourselves that they have neither mystery nor beauty," he says in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles* (II). "It is one of our systems of hygiene among which we are at liberty to choose our own, a system which is perhaps not to be recommended too strongly, but it gives us a certain tranquillity with which to spend what remains of life, and also—since it enables us to regret nothing, by assuring us that we have attained to the best, and that the best was nothing out of the common—with which to resign ourselves to death." Chained to his sick bed as he was, he wanted both to revel in his past and to destroy its attraction. "Society," of which he used to be so fond, became at last only an illusion to be destroyed. And so did love, sensuality, marriage, friendship. In fact, nothing proved worth while—nothing except passive drifting away on the waves of memory—of the *temps perdu*, from the contemplation of which he derived at least a strong intellectual pleasure.

But there was a third element partly responsible for the character of his work. As is known, Proust

was a typical spoiled child. Petted and pampered by his mother, and later by Society, he never became really independent and "grown-up." He remained in some respects a big child to the end of his life. Among other characteristics he preserved the indiscriminating generosity, the sensitiveness, and also the indecision of a child. Such a thing as will-power was unknown to him. Hence his fear of all change, of all situations which were likely to require an independent choice or decision on his part. Incapable of such an effort, he regarded all facts and trifles—even the most obvious—as equally difficult, and therefore equally important. Lacking that inner backbone which develops together with one's strength of will, he was at the mercy of every single impression and emotion to such an extent as to be overwhelmed by it. His only protective weapon against this abnormal sensibility was his exaggerated analysis. And so when assailed by the mass of his impressions, he could disentangle himself only by cautiously analysing *all* their moments and aspects. Anxious to be as explicit as possible, he never omits anything. He needs more than a hundred pages to describe a dinner party, or a reception. But for this very reason he leaves nothing to the imagination of the reader. This in itself is sufficient to make the perusal of his books a difficult task.

IX

The first perusal of Proust's work may be even boring—boring owing precisely to an excess of

piled-up subtleties and observations. Dostoevsky's novels " get hold " of you at once ; they enter into you, while the books of Proust must be entered into by you. This task is not easy, but it is worth while : the sudden surprise and the great æsthetic, as well as psychologic, enjoyment which one derives from it, after one has appropriated the peculiar tone and atmosphere of Proust's world, are one of those experiences which redeem many a sin of modern literature.

One may dislike his subject-matter, his apparent " ethical nihilism," his indifference to everything that goes beyond æsthetic and purely intellectual considerations, yet one cannot deny that he is an important artist who has added, in an original way, a new region to the modern psychological novel. He showed that even psycho-analytical raw material can be converted into art, if the writer is endowed with real style and a real vision : the two elements which in true creators—and Proust was one of them—are inseparable. " The style," he says, " is in no way an embellishment (*enjolivement*), as certain people think, it is not even a question of technique : but—like colour with a painter—it is a quality of vision, the revealing of that particular universe which each of us sees, and which others do not see. The pleasure that an artist gives us is that he shows us yet another universe."

In this definition (given by Proust to a writer in *Le Temps* in 1913) lies the clue to Proust's own style. In his first book, *Les plaisirs et les jours*, prefaced by Anatole France and published in 1896, Proust still confuses style with embellishment. He poses in it as a literary

Beau Brummel. But years of silent work followed, during which Proust's style underwent a great change. The conventionally elaborate, at times even precious manner, of his youthful work gave way to the sober, substantial and yet indefinable style of his *A la recherche du temps perdu:* indefinable, because in spite of its many technical flaws—its much too involved sentences, its monotony, its endless interpolations, its zigzagging attempts at a complete, a scientific precision —it has an elusive charm of its own, a *je ne sais quoi* that remains inseparable from that "new universe" which Proust's art has annexed to the consciousness of modern man.

X

If the slow, contemplative Proust can be called the least dramatic of modern novelists, Dostoevsky remains the greatest dramatist among them. This is seen even in his style, which is always somewhat unkempt, too eruptive, too improvised to be blameless. It is only because his genius makes one forget style and form that one does not mind his lapses of taste. From his *Poor Folk* to the *Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky' style remained essentially the same: nervous, hasty and emotional. Dostoevsky makes even his dialectics emotional, while Proust "intellectualises" even his emotions. And their different manner of evoking characters may be perhaps compared with the difference between an introspective impressionist and an introspective "expressionist." Proust introduces his characters through a number of accumulated small touches, while

Dostoevsky usually chooses such a dramatic situation as will allow him to make a psychological "short cut" and show us the new hero by means of a few incisive sentences. An approximate illustration of this difference can be obtained by a comparison of the first appearance of Baron de Charlus (in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles*) with that of Svidrigaylov in *Crime and Punishment.*

"I turned my head," writes Proust, "and saw a man of about forty, very tall and rather stout, with a very dark moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, kept fastened upon me a pair of eyes dilated with observation. Every now and then those eyes were shot through by a look of intense activity, such as the sight of a person unknown to them excites only in men to whom, for whatever reason, it suggests thoughts that would not occur to anyone else —madmen, for instance, or spies. He trained upon me a supreme stare at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy at the moment when one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, by an abrupt revolution of his whole body, turned to examine a playbill on the wall, in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss rose in his buttonhole. He drew from his pocket a note-book, in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked two or three times at his watch, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat, the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it

like a visor, as though to see whether someone were at last coming, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to show that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close except at the sides, where he allowed a pair of waved ' pigeon's wings ' to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people give who are not feeling too hot but would like it to be thought that they were. . . . He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, bit his lips, pushed up his moustache, and in the lens of his eyes made an adjustment of something that was indifferent, harsh, almost insulting, so effectively that the singularity of his expression made me take him for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and gave a reassurance to my own suit, so often humiliated by the dazzling and commonplace whiteness of their holiday garb. . . ."

And so on. For this is only about one tenth of the trifles with which he introduces to us one of his principal characters. How much more quickly, dramatically and without detail, does Dostoevsky introduce to the reader his Svidrigaylov. Raskolnikov, lying half-delirious after his crime, woke up from the nightmare in which he had been vainly trying to kill, once more, the old pawnbroker-woman.

" He drew a deep breath—but his dream seemed strangely to persist: his door was flung open and a

man whom he had never seen stood in the doorway watching him intently.

" Raskolnikov had hardly opened his eyes, and he instantly closed them again. He lay on his back without stirring.

" ' Is it still a dream ? ' he wondered, and again raised his eyelids hardly perceptibly ; the stranger was standing on the same spot, still watching him.

" He stepped cautiously into the room, carefully closing the door after him, went up to the table, paused a moment, still keeping his eyes on Raskolnikov, and noiselessly seated himself on the chair by the sofa ; he put his hat on the floor beside him and leaned his hands on his cane and his chin on his hands. It was evident that he was prepared to wait indefinitely. As far as Raskolnikov could make out from his stolen glances, he was a man no longer young, stout, with a full, fair, almost whitish beard.

" Ten minutes passed. It was still light, but beginning to get dusk. There was complete stillness in the room. Only a big fly buzzed and fluttered against the window-pane. It was unbearable at last. Raskolnikov suddenly got up and sat on the sofa.

" ' Come, tell me what you want.'

" ' I knew you were not asleep, but only pretending,' the stranger answered oddly, laughing calmly. ' Arkady Ivanovich Svidrigaylov, allow me to introduce myself.' "[1]

[1] Translated by Constance Garnett (Heinemann).

XI

These incomplete generalisations may be concluded with the same statement with which they began: the only excuse for confronting the two writers is that of contrast. They are poles apart in the psychological novel, in temperament, in mentality, in artistic method, in *Weltanschauung*, in everything. Dostoevsky is dynamic; Proust is static. Dostoevsky treats life as an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil; Proust treats it as an "involuntary" day-dream. Dostoevsky's creation shows a frenzied impulse of a self-divided consciousness towards a final unity and wholeness of man; that of Proust reflects a dispassionate and subtle display of its final inner "atomisation." Man in the tragic quest for his self-realisation, in spite of the spiritual chaos he has to endure—this is the *leitmotif* of Dostoevsky. The disappointed "man of society" who exploits his own disappointment in order to turn it into æsthetic and intellectual pleasure—this is one of the chief impulses of Proust's work. If Dostoevsky's art symbolises the author's own fight for a new man and a new life, Proust's big novel is an ingenious substitute for life on the part of a refined but imprisoned Epicurean. Yet in their own regions and upon their own planes they are both matchless explorers. As such they have enlarged not only the territory of the psychological novel, but also our knowledge of the self-divided, doubting and disintegrating modern soul.

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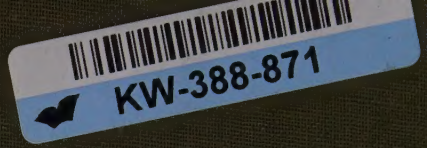
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